

The AKEY BrAKEY News

a bi-annual newsletter from the Richland County Historical Society

April, 2011 Volume #3 – Issue # 1 – promoting and supporting the History of Richland County and Southwestern Wisconsin

DOING BUSINESS WITH KROUSKOP BROTHERS

By Jerry Bower

[This is Part One of a two-part article about two Krouskop brothers, George and Abiel H. “Doc,” who were important pioneer businessmen. This Part One will focus primarily on George.]

In the summer of 1851, Jacob and Elizabeth Krouskop brought their seven children from Ohio to Sextonville. In 1848, the year that Wisconsin was admitted to the Union, Jacob had purchased a 160 acre farm near the little settlement from Robert McCloud. This eventually formed the nucleus of the ambitious economic efforts of the Krouskops. For example, William, one of the sons, bought the farm from his father in 1857 and, by 1884, had expanded it to 310 acres.

Jacob, himself, in addition to farming, bought a sawmill in 1853 from E. M. Sexton (for whom Sextonville is named). Sexton had built the mill two years earlier, when he created a mill pond on Willow Creek with a brush and dirt dam. The waterwheel operated a noisy up-and-down saw that ripped through logs. Immediately, Jacob added a three-story grist mill, with two run of stone for grinding grain into flour.

The two Krouskop sons that are the focus of this article, George and Abiel H. “Doc,” were both born in Bellefontaine, Logan County, Ohio. George, born 12 May 1833, was a decade older than Abiel, who entered life 13 July 1843. Both were educated in the common school of Bellefontaine. George also completed an academic course at Geneva College in northern Ohio. Abiel, of course, continued his education in Wisconsin.

George had come to Sextonville in spring 1850 and spent the summer “prospecting” Richland County. He returned to Ohio in the fall, but had been sufficiently impressed with “the apparent natural advantages and undeveloped resources” that he came to Wisconsin in 1851 with the rest of the Krouskop family.

When George arrived in Sextonville on his prospecting trip, the settlement contained just five structures—three homes, a little general store operated in the front room of a home, and a blacksmith shop. Early in 1851, before the Krouskops arrived, E. M. Sexton had his village platted and began construction of a hotel. Sextonville had been named a “special” post office in 1849, which received mail once a week from Highland, if someone volunteered to carry the mail sack from Highland to Sextonville. In 1853 the post office began to receive mail from Madison. It then sent mail on to Richland Center, La Crosse, and Prairie du Chien. The railroad from Madison reached Lone Rock in 1857 and from then on the mail came from Lone Rock on a regular schedule. There was no rural mail delivery, so farmers had to go to the post office to pick up their mail.

George, in 1854, opened a general store near his father’s mills, which he was managing. In 1857 he purchased the mills and added a third run of stone to the grist mill. From the mid 1850s to the mid 1860s Wisconsin was either the #1 or #2 wheat producing state in the Union, so there was plenty of grain to grind into flour. Somehow, during these years, George also taught school. No doubt his younger siblings, like Abiel, were among his pupils. George operated his general store and mills until 1863, when he and Abiel bought out J. W. Lybrand and moved to Richland Center to take over operation of Lybrand’s Store, on the northwest corner of Center and Court Streets.

On November 22, 1855, George married a Richland Center woman, Elizabeth Black. The couple had two children, William Edward, born in 1858, and Eliza Amanda, born in 1861. Eliza married J. Robert Coumbe, a son of John Coumbe, the first white settler in Richland County.

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Meanwhile Abiel, George's younger brother by ten years, had been developing his own interests. Since he was just eight years old when the Krouskops arrived in Sextonville, Abiel attended school whenever it was offered. Abiel, no doubt, had chores to do on the family farm and around the mills. Teenaged Abiel bought a yoke of oxen and hired it and himself to haul farm produce to Lone Rock to the railroad for area farmers. They also helped clear farm land, dragging logs and pulling stumps. Abiel also clerked for his brother in the little general store. It cannot be doubted that it is here that Abiel began to learn the skills that would carry him far in the business world. Abiel had saved enough money by 1863 that he was able to be George's equal partner when they bought Lybrand's Store for \$40,000.

In Richland Center, the Krouskop Brothers Store naturally dealt extensively in farm produce. Richland County farmers sold their produce to wholesalers, like the Krouskops, and purchased their supplies from the same store. The Krouskops, by carefully extending credit, attracted more and more farmers to their store. Margaret Scott, in her *Richland Center, Wisconsin, A History*, listed the Krouskops' sales for 1867: 2,150 dressed hogs (398,752 pounds), 10,000 bushels of wheat, 10,850 pounds of butter, 10,000 pounds of wool, and 4,954 pounds of ginseng. (36) The federal census of 1870 revealed that George and A. H. Krouskop were number two and three, respectively, in their real estate and personal property holdings among Richland Center citizens. Only Ira Haseltine, the founder of Richland Center, topped them in both categories.

In 1870 George opened the first bank in Richland Center. His bank was located in one room in the upstairs of the Krouskop Store. The only equipment beyond a table and chairs was a huge safe, which burglars hopefully could not force or carry away. At that time anyone with sufficient capital could start a bank. The state legislature had to approve a charter, but this was routinely done because the legislators believed that chartering banks and other corporations was a good way to expand the economy. Some of the banks and corporations chartered turned out to be "fly-by-night" operations that collected money and then disappeared.

The next year, 1871, George was instrumental in convincing the legislature to approve a charter for the Pine River and Stevens Point Railroad. Of course, it did not hurt George's application that he was a state senator, elected in 1870! Ever since the railroad had reached Lone Rock, in April 1857, Richland Center merchants had discussed the need for a narrow-gauge railroad to connect to the main line at Lone Rock.

When the main line from Madison to Prairie du Chien was being surveyed in 1853-54 hopes were that the line would remain on the north bank of the Wisconsin River. This would have spurred the growth of Richland County communities on the north bank, such as Richland City and Orion. But the railroad's civil engineers decided that the bluffs on the north side of the Wisconsin were too close to the river to allow convenient construction of the tracks. So, they decided to cross the Wisconsin at Lone Rock and lay the rest of the line to Prairie du Chien in the wider valley on the south side of the river. **... continued on the insert**

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By Jerry Bower

A year ago the Historical Society agreed to serve as the fiscal agent for Fourthwall Films so that the filmmakers, Tammy and Kelly Rundle, could apply for a grant from the Wisconsin Humanities Council. They proposed to create a documentary film focused on one-room rural schools. The Rundles had selected our Historical Society because we operate the Akey School Museum. The Rundles received the grant.

They came to the Akey School last July, on a stormy afternoon, to film the school and to interview me. They spent over two hours videotaping and taking still photos. Time passed until, in December, the Rundles indicated that the film was in the final stages of production and the Historical Society should secure a venue for the Wisconsin premier of *Country School: One Room-One Nation*. I approached John Scribbens, the events coordinator for the City Auditorium, about holding the premier in that historic facility.

He readily said "yes," and the Wisconsin premier was held on a snowy February Saturday afternoon. The film received a resounding ovation, as did the panelists-Kelly Rundle, author Jerry Apps, and myself-who held a question and answer session. I am especially proud to report that more than 250 attended the premier! That's 50 more than attended the earlier Iowa premier in Des Moines. I hope that many of you were able to attend. The Historical Society is purchasing DVDs to donate to the Brewer Library, so if you missed the premier, you will be able to borrow the DVD and see for yourself the fantastic result of the project.

RICHLAND CENTER CHRISTIAN CHURCH CELEBRATES ANNIVERSARY

By Eleanor Poole

The Richland Center Christian Church dates back to the 1850's when a large group of people, more or less related, came to Richland County from Kentucky, Ohio and Indiana. Some of the family names were: Miller, Snyder, Ross, Bayse, Babb, Crumbecker, Howard, Fox, Klingler, Whitcraft, Shambaugh, Glasier, Ray, Davis and Jones. The families were mostly large with many of the children grown and married. The James and Eliza A. Snyder family had 9 children: John T., Catherine J. Jeremiah L. William M., James B., Isaac Nelson, Barton Warren Stone, Mary E., and Albert. My great grandfather was Isaac Nelson Snyder. John, Kate, Bart and Albert went back to Rock County and became the nucleus of the churches at Center and Footville.

Soon after these people arrived in Richland County, they built a log school house on the SW corner of the Miller Farm which was named "Science Hill" by James Ross, who taught school there. Another school was built about ¼ mile east of the Pine River School. These schools were also used as meeting places for worship and other forms of social life such as spelling bees. Very seldom did a preacher visit them, but Elder Seth Bayse was always there to expound the scriptures. The first Church of Christ was organized in 1855. Sometime after the Civil War, the school house from the Miller Farm was moved and became the Rocky Branch School. After a few years the two congregations combined and built a church located in the present Pine River Cemetery.

In 1881, G.L. Brokaw, state evangelist, held a meeting in Richland Center, with the view of organizing a church. On December 31, Elder Brokaw preached his first sermon in the Methodist Church, by invitation of the pastor. The Baptist Church, not being in use, was secured and a meeting held which continued until January 24, 1882. The snow was deep and the weather cold, but good audiences heard the preacher. On January 22, 1882, the church was organized with a membership of 27. Six of these were baptized. Meetings were held once a month in the Baptist Church until December, 1882 when the Presbyterian Church was secured for monthly meetings until the first building was erected.

The first section of the church home was erected in 1885 when a lot was purchased which was covered by a pine thicket. George Breese was engaged to clean it off and build the wall. While clearing it, his son, Gilbert, about 7 or 8 years, climbed a small tree, fell and broke his arm. John B. Jones donated the rock, quarried on what was known as the Krouskop farm, southeast of town. The church building was a wooden structure with the entrance at the southeast corner of Park and Seminary Streets, painted a dark green. This church had about 75 members, mostly transferred from the Pine River Church. The building was dedicated on March 1, 1885 by L.L. Carpenter of Wabash, Indiana; 25 members were added. **... continued on Page 3**

AKEY SCHOOL

OPENING JUNE 5TH

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 off 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.

**Please come and visit!
FREE Admission !!**



Pictured above is Lemuel and Mary Akey for which the school was named.

Pictures provided by Lon Arbegust

With a charter in hand, the investors in the Pine River and Stevens Point RR met in August 1872 to elect officers and directors and to plan construction. George and Abiel Krouskop were elected president and vice president, respectively, of the company. The directors tried to interest the Milwaukee Road, which built and operated the main line, in building the spur to Lone Rock, but were told that the little line would never be profitable. So, in 1875, construction by local contractors began. David G. James won the contract to grade the roadbed and lay the maple rails. He employed 150 men and 50 horse teams to do the work. Since the line was built from Richland Center, the source of the ties and wooden rails, the small Porter Bell steam engine was hauled from Lone Rock to Richland Center by five horses, five mules, and six oxen. The engine then hauled the building materials to the end of the line. A thin metal strip was attached to the top of the maple rails to protect them from rapid wear. On July 1, 1876, the little railroad made its maiden run. The excursion moved so slowly that children jumped off, ran ahead to pick berries, and then hopped back on. Despite the Milwaukee Road's dismal prediction about its success, the narrow-gauge line soon proved a money-maker. Now, wholesalers could more rapidly ship their produce to eastern cities, where they arrived in better condition. Some farmers, in fact, began to ship their own produce to a major market, if they had a sufficient amount to fill at least half a freight car. In 1880 the Milwaukee Road admitted its error by purchasing the little railroad for \$56,000. This was enough to pay all debts and return fifty cents on the dollar to the investors.

The biographical sketch of George Krouskop in the *History of Crawford and Richland Counties, Wisconsin (1884)*, states that "Mr. Krouskop has always taken a leading part in all public enterprises and improvements which would advance or develop the material resources of the town and county, and has aided them liberally both by his influence and his ample means." (1185) George's role in community development brought him sufficient recognition that he was elected state senator for two terms, serving 1871-75. What is unusual about this is that George was a Democrat in a heavily Republican district. Yet he won both elections by a comfortable margin.

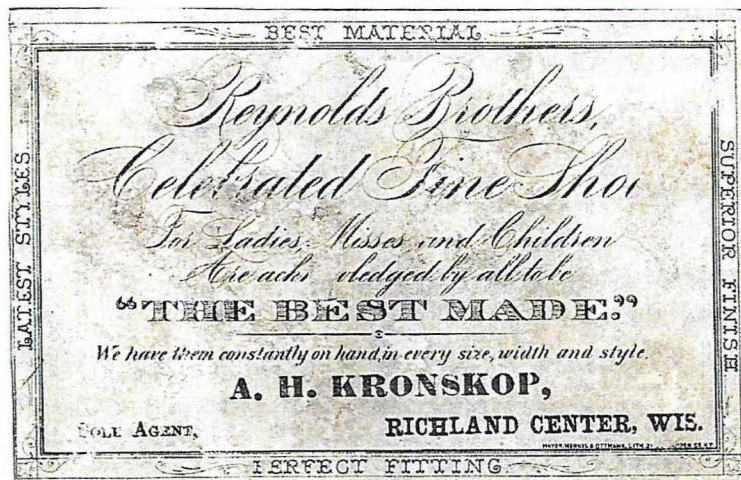
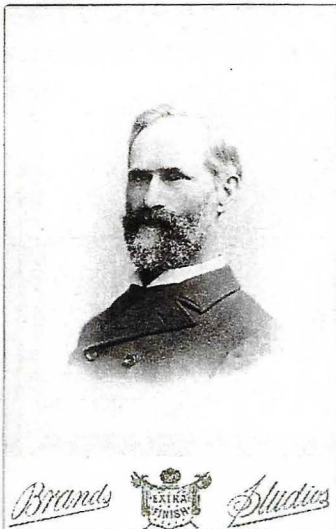
The sources in the Richland County History Room do not contain information about George's various "public enterprises" or about his bank. George's obituary in the *Republican Observer*, 27 May 1897, p. 8, states tersely that, "In 1870 he opened the first bank in Richland Center, which he continued until overtaken by financial disaster." I am guessing that the financial disaster that ruined George's bank was the Panic of 1893. This Panic, as this recession was labeled in the 19th century, caused the bankruptcy of 25% of Wisconsin's banks. The "panic" referred to a desperate run on a bank by depositors, who hoped to withdraw their money before the bank folded. Unfortunately, we just do not know if there was such a run on George's bank.

George Krouskop died unexpectedly, 23 May 1897. His obituary explained that he had been downtown on Friday morning, evidently in good health and high spirits. That evening, however, he did not feel well and he accidentally took an overdose of his medicine. On Sunday, with his discomfort increasing, his doctor was called, but it was too late. George passed away about 9:00 in the evening, from the overdose and his underlying condition.

The End of Part One

Part Two of *Doing Business With Krouskops* will concentrate on Abiel H. "Doc" Krouskop.

Pictures provided by Lon Arbegust Courtesy of the Dave Ewing Collection



In 1899, it was decided to enlarge the building and the structure was turned ¼ of the way around, raised up to make room for a basement and Sunday School rooms were added. J.W. Huston donated the rock for the wall and hauled it from his quarry behind his stone house on Huston Heights [W. Seminary Street]. John and Steven Bird built the wall. The engraving on the cornerstone is "CHURCH OF CHRIST 1885-1889".

The building has been enlarged several times and in 1907, it was decided to veneer it with brick and Charles Horne laid them up. Also, there was a steeple with a bell at this time. About 1917, the steeple was struck by lightning and removed, leaving a flat roof on the entry. The membership was about 200 at that time. They had no creed but Christ, no guidebook but the Bible. Their motto: "Where the Scriptures speak, we speak; where they are silent, we are silent".

There have been many improvements and additions to the building through the years. New windows were installed about 1945. The old coal burning, one register furnace was replaced with an oil burning furnace in 1949. The furnace exploded in 1958 and there was so much smoke and soot damage that services were held in the Masonic Temple several weeks while the church was being redecorated. New pews were installed in 1963. In 1970, an educational unit was built on the north side of the building and the kitchen was remodeled. In 1986, more rooms were added on the west side of the building and more of the basement finished off.

On June 10, 1985 the church celebrated the 100th anniversary and the cornerstone was opened at that time. On August 29, 2010 the 125th anniversary was celebrated with some former ministers, guest speakers, friends, pictures and many memories.

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