



# The AKEY BRAKEY News

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a bi-annual newsletter from the Richland County Historical Society

October, 2017 Volume #9 – Issue # 2 – promoting and supporting the History of Richland County and Southwestern Wisconsin

## LIGHTS ON! A.V. MILLER, THE REA, AND LIGHTING RICHLAND COUNTY'S FARMS [Part II]

By Dr. Jerry Bower

This article completes the story of how electricity was generated to light up Richland Center and Richland County. In it, we meet A.V. Miller, the third key man in bringing power to our city and county. Previously we learned about George Strang, who provided electricity to Richland Center, and Fred W. Schuerman, whose Willow Creek generating plant was the first in Wisconsin to provide the convenience of electricity to a rural area.

Now, WP & L began circulating "rumors" among Richland County farmers about what would happen if they signed up with the RECA. For example, the private utility warned that farmers would have to mortgage their farms to raise the capital to get the REA lines constructed. If the cooperative failed, they would lose their farms. Another rumor cautioned that, if the RECA collapsed, the members would be personally responsible for any debts. WP & L forewarned that the cooperative would advertise low rates to get farmers to sign up but, afterward, the rates would rise rapidly. One blast asserted that a "bunch of farmers" couldn't successfully operate an electric company. It was just too complicated. Service would be poor and intermittent.

Every one of these harmful allegations was a lie! The REA legislation covered every one of WP & L's rumors. The capital for the project would come from an REA loan, not by farmers mortgaging their farms. In the unlikely event that the RECA failed, the members were protected against any liability for debts, just as corporation officers are not personally responsible for debts. The RECA would not be free dramatically to increase rates because any increase had to be approved by the state Public Service Commission. Finally, farmers were not going to construct the lines. The RECA would contract with professional firms to construct the lines and transfer stations. And, these contracts had to be approved by both the state and national REA offices, to assure that the firm could do what it promised. Despite the lack of truth in WP & L's insidious campaign, these rumors no doubt made the task of the RECA recruiters more difficult, because they had to disprove each alarm a farmer had heard.

When the WP & L proposed line north of Richland Center was stymied by the Marshall and Rockbridge Town Boards' withdrawal of construction permits, the company attacked from the north. It proposed to extend a high tension line south from Hillsboro, along Highway 80, into the heart of Richland County. In addition, in late 1935, WP & L offered to buy Robert Novy's Yuba generating plant. This time, both the Vernon and Richland County Electric Cooperatives protested WP & L's "cherry picking" of the easiest to reach customers. In their petition to the Public Service Commission, requesting a "stop Order," the Cooperatives noted that, in the past, the private utility had refused to provide power to farmers located more than a quarter mile from its line. The PSC soon issued a temporary injunction and, in December 1936, made it permanent. The PSC had decided that WP & L could not justify its proposed \$1,000.00 per mile cost in an area where two rural electric cooperatives were busily signing up customers.

Robert Novy and his customers had been eager to have Wisconsin Power and Light purchase the Yuba generating plant and supply around-the-clock power to the village. The PSC injunction, of course, brought an end to the negotiations between Novy and WP & L. In the fall of 1937, a fire destroyed Novy's generator. He soon contracted with the RECA to supply power to his customers, while he sought financing to rebuild. However, Novy failed to attract sufficient financing and, two years later, he sold his business to the RECA.

During 1936 both local weekly newspapers—*The Republican Observer* and *The Richland Democrat*—closely followed the development of the RECA and its battles with Wisconsin Power and Light. In January and February, both newspapers described the progress the cooperative representatives were making in signing up customers. (The national REA required an average of at least three customers per mile of wire before it would even consider a loan application.)

The first issue of *The Democrat* in 1936 reported that the PSC had ordered WP & L to halt construction of its proposed high lines along Brush Creek and Fancy Creek. Later in January *The Democrat* informed its readers that four townships—Bloom, Henrietta, Marshall, and Rockbridge—had petitioned to be served by the county cooperative. The proposed lines would also bring power to the villages of Bloom City, Gillingham, and Rockbridge. The article noted that 419 customers had signed up **[continued on page 3]**



In recent editions of *The AKEY BRAKEY News* the Lone Rock to Richland Center Railroad line was featured. This edition highlights a midway point at what is now Gotham and formerly just to the south was originally what was then Richland City.

<http://ci.richland-center.wi.us/wp-content/uploads/2014/03/Gotham-Train-Depot.pdf>

As early as April 28, 1857, there was a movement made looking toward the bringing of a railroad from Lone Rock to Richland Center, ... 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, three and one-half by five inches in diameter. All the road was laid with maple rails except three miles of switches and sidetracks, which were laid with iron rails. In December, 1875, the engine was purchased, and also some flat cars for construction purposes. The locomotive 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 was soon carried to completion and was ready for business on July 1, 1876, when the first passenger train ran through from Richland Center to Lone Rock.

<http://www.usgenweb.info/wirichland/books/1906-14.htm>

This town [of Beuna Vista] was organized during the winter of 1848-49, by an act of the legislature, and on the first Tuesday in April, 1849, the electors of the town met at the house of I. H. Wallace in Richland City, and organized ...

The village of Richland City -- once of considerable importance -- is located on the southeast quarter of section 31, town 9, range 2 east. The original proprietors of the village plat were Isaac Wallace and Garwood Greene, who laid out the village in 1849. In 1851 A. C. Daley became an equal partner with Wallace and Greene in an addition that was made that year. The addition was laid out on the north side of the original plat, and was known as Wallace, Greene and Daley's addition to Richland City. Until the completion of the Prairie du Chien branch of the Chicago Milwaukee & St. Paul Railroad, in 1856, steamboats plied the Wisconsin river as far up as Portage, and Richland City was the most important landing on the route, but the completion of the railroad put an end to such traffic, and from that time business in the village rapidly declined.

## Presidents Corner

Improvements to Akey School

by Nicholas Studnicka

The flag pole was finally installed and looks great, I would like to thank Ken Thiede for spear heading that project. Also the large duct work at the front of the school room was removed to give the space a better feel and look. Jerry Bower used some left over paint to blend the area exposed by removing the duct work.

Jerry Apps, noted author, was interviewed by PBS at the Akey School and the interview will appear on PBS some time during a pledge drive later this year.

We had around 130 visitors to the Akey School this year with overall comments being positive about the look and feel of the interior of the building. Upcoming Projects: We will be looking at the bell of the school. During the summer the rope snapped, we are hoping for an easy fix. Looking to the future of the Akey School I would like to either repaint the exterior of the building after scraping off all of the old and loose paint. Another option would be to have vinyl siding or solid plastic siding. I am looking for suggestions and or possible volunteering time to lessen the cost of repainting. Currently the Richland County Historical Society has some money on hand for this.

<http://www.usgenweb.info/wirichland/books/chap21.htm>

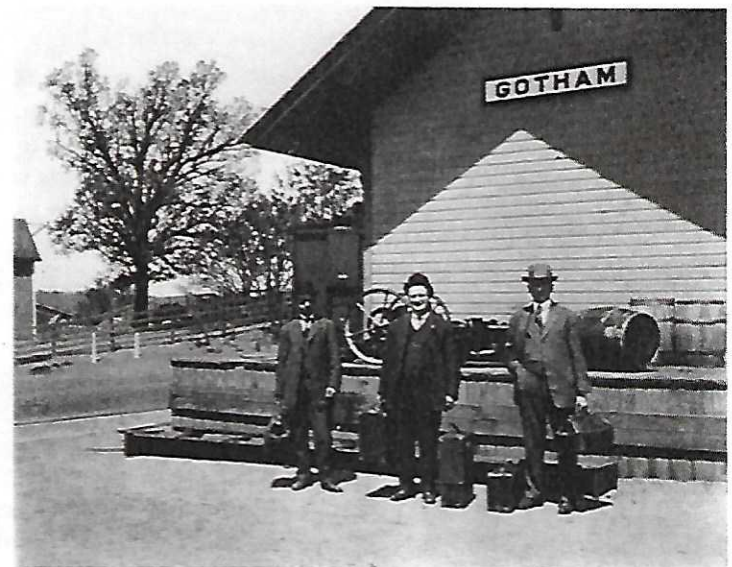
## Post offices.

There are four post offices in the town of Buena Vista. The first established was at Richland City ...

The Gotham post office is located at Richland City station. It was so named in honor of Capt. M W Gotham, who has been postmaster since the establishment of the office in July, 1882...

Richland City was for a number of years an important point. Until the completion of the Prairie du Chien branch of the C, M & St. P. Railroad, in 1856, steamboats plied the Wisconsin River as far up as Portage, and Richland City was the most important landing on the route. But the completion of the railroad put an end to the traffic on the river, and from that time business in the village rapidly diminished.

<https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Image/IM90825#>



*From the archives this photo shows the Gotham Depot that today has been transformed into a home while still maintaining the historic building features. The old depot building is located one block south from Highway 60 next to the Beuna Vista Town Hall.*



along the proposed 110 miles of wire. That was 3.8 users per mile, well above what the national REA required. *The Observer*, in reporting on these developments, included a quote from County Agent Miller about the national REA's reaction to the project in Richland County. "The Richland County project is one of the best rural electrification undertakings in the Midwest according to a representative of the Washington REA office who examined recently the layout of the lines. The percentage of the farms to which current will be available and the completeness of the project, make this undertaking almost ideal."

On 23 April 1936, all who were interested in the REA project attended a meeting in the City Auditorium. Representatives of the Wisconsin REA office told the attendees that, in their opinion, the Richland County project was a "go." A major item of business was to elect officers and directors for the Richland Electric Cooperative Association.

The men chosen to lead the RECA included many who had been leaders in Richland County for many years. A. V. Miller was selected as president, Ronald Ferguson became vice president, Theron Janney was named secretary, and Otto Stanek was tapped to be the treasurer. The Board of Directors included, for a one-year term: Wencil T. Stanik, Joe Seep, Ed Keller; for two-year terms: Earl Eaton, Ronald Ferguson, Jay Sheafor; and for three year terms: A. V. Miller, Theron Janney, and Otto Stanek.

Miller served as president of the RECA until 1943, when he was succeeded by Joe Seep, who served the next 28 years. Altogether, Joe Seep served on the RECA Board for 50 years, 1936 to 1986. Seep, like the other REA pioneers spent much time away from home, working on the electric cooperative project. Fortunately, Joe and his wife, Agnes, had six sons and three daughters who ran the farm in dad's absence. Joe related that his sons didn't always agree with his "old fashioned" farm techniques. For example, the boys regularly removed the tongue from the horse-drawn manure spreader and hitched it to the tractor. Joe knew what was happening but decided not to say anything because the chores were being done. The Seeps' farm finally got electricity in 1938. Initially the power was used for lights, ironing and to pump water. When the power was turned on, Agnes reported that she stayed up almost all night ironing! In addition to his tenure in the RECA, Joe served fifty years as the Westford Town Board chairman and he served an equal number of years on the Richland County Board.

Theron Janney, who was born on the family farm in January 1897, followed in his father's footsteps. Israel Janney served many years as Rockbridge Town Treasurer, as Town Chairman, and as a member of the Richland County Board. After moving to Richland Center, Israel served five terms as an alderman. Around 1900 Israel was a leader in organizing a farmer-owned telephone cooperative. Theron was elected the first secretary of the RECA and he held the post for 36 years. During his tenure, Theron was elected as the RECA's representative on the Dairyland Electric Cooperative's board of directors. He served in this capacity for 24 years. In addition, Theron was a director of the Consumers Cooperative (now Premier Cooperative) from 1941 to 1963.

The Stanek brothers-Otto and Wencil-both had long careers on the RECA board. Otto, who was the first treasurer, served 28 years. Wencil served 25 years as a director. Wencil related that some farmers would have preferred that Wisconsin Power and Light provide electricity to their farms, because they thought the service would be more reliable. As a result, a few of these farmers refused permission for the RECA line to cross their property. Wencil recalled that the Spangler Brothers blacksmith shop was moved about one-half mile so that it could be connected, when a neighbor refused an easement for an RECA power line.

During the same 23 April, 1936 meeting, the members authorized the newly-elected officers and directors to apply to the national REA for a \$250,000.00 loan. The interest would be 3% and the loan could be repaid over twenty years. Individuals could also receive an REA LOAN AT 3% to help with the cost of bringing power to their home and barn. The quarter of a million dollars the RECA requested would build 231 miles of power line and serve 752 farms. Because of the diligent efforts of A. V. Miller and many others, the RECA loan application was the first one approved in Wisconsin! The good news of national approval arrived in July 1936, and by mid-July, the RECA was soliciting bids from contractors for constructing the lines and installing the transformers and other equipment.

A major reason that the local REA members approved submitting the loan application is that the City of Richland Center had agreed to supply power to the yet-to-be-built REA lines at a rate acceptable to the national REA. That rate was 1.5 cents per kilowatt hour (KWH). The Richland Center Utility had to increase its generating capacity to assure it could supply electricity to both city and rural residents. The expansion involved spending up to \$100,000.00 to acquire an additional generator. This purchase touched off a political battle that continued into July 1936, long after the generator purchase had been approved.

To understand the controversy, some background in city politics is necessary. The problem this researcher had is that much of the discussion probably occurred in private conversations, which of course were not reported in the local weeklies. Consequently, what is presented here is an account pieced together from *Republican Observer* and *Richland Democrat* reports and from a few manuscript collections in the Richland County History Room.

The key players in the controversy were three prominent Richland Center men: attorneys Levi Bancroft and Francis Brewer and dentist D. (Daniel) E. Smith. Smith had been elected mayor in 1930, for a two-year term. As the 1932 mayoral election approached, Smith said that he was a candidate for re-election. *The Republican Observer* (2/25/1932) reported that, "F. L. Brewer is being urged by many to become a candidate for mayor and he is being solicited to make the run. He has not consented to this however, but his many friends are urging him to let them circulate nomination papers." By the middle of March, both local papers were reporting that the mayoral candidates were Smith and Brewer. At the very end of March *The Republican Observer* printed letters from both candidates. In his, incumbent Smith pointed out to voters that his administration had reduced taxes and electric rates and still had a healthy balance in the City's accounts at year's end. Brewer naturally challenged this rosy picture. Brewer asserted that, if you added state aids to Smith's figures, the Smith administration had spent far more than the figure Smith claimed.

<http://www.hillsborowi.com/index.asp>

?SEC=A8104550-54B1-49BD-8545-AD2A80CB8DAE&Type=B\_BASIC

Hillsboro  
Historical  
Society



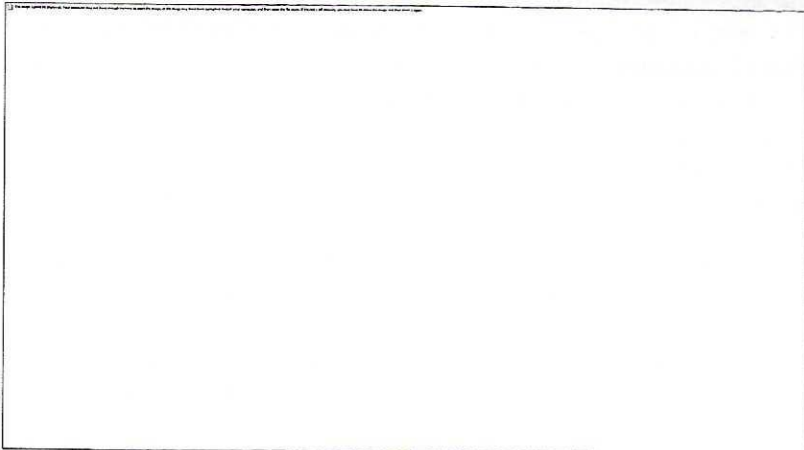
The Hillsboro Historical Museum, Log Cabin, replica one-room School House, and Antique Machinery Shed are located at Albert Field Memorial Park on Maple Street in the City of Hillsboro. Offering an abundant collection of historical pieces, artifacts, and publications, the Historical Society offers hours of entertainment and a true historical perspective of Hillsboro. The facility is open Sundays from 1:00 p.m. to 3:00 p.m. from Memorial Day to Labor Day, and by appointment. Call (608) 489-3594 or (608) 489-2516 or email [hillsborohistory@gmail.com](mailto:hillsborohistory@gmail.com) for more information.

Consider a "Day Tripper" to Hillsboro. Certainly stop at the Hillsboro Historical Society. One of the featured locations in Hillsboro would be the Hillsboro Brewery. History of a brewery there dates back to the 19<sup>th</sup> Century. The current brewery has a history also.

Hillsboro Brewing Co. opened in 1936 and closed in 1943 it was open for 7 years. This brewery was open for quite a few years so it is easier to find items and advertising than some breweries that did not last long, this can make the Breweriana items less valuable. Breweries that started up right after Prohibition was repealed, up to around the 1950s are the last group that represent highly collectible and valuable Breweriana for the most part. The period after Prohibition was when cans became popular so some of the rarest and most desirable cans come from this period. For cans to be very valuable they need to be rare, and in very good condition in most cases. Our information indicates that Hillsboro Brewing Co. was the only brewery that was located in Hillsboro, WI sometimes this means that items from a brewery will have extra value in the area it comes from because there are not other sources for local breweriana. For help finding information please contact: [OldBreweries.com](http://OldBreweries.com)

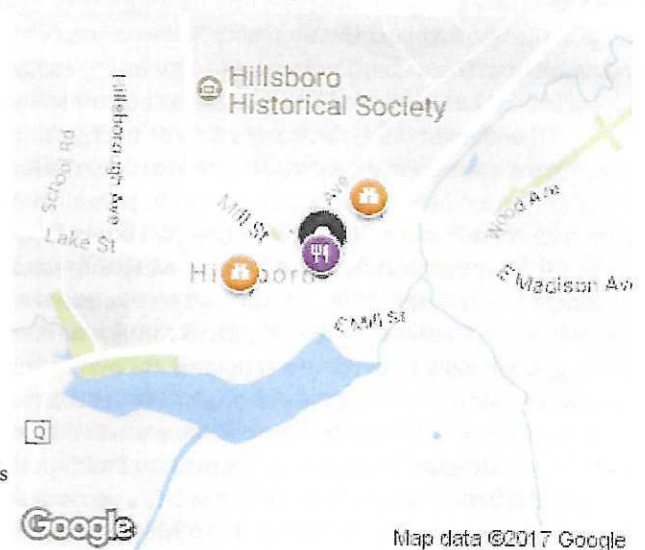
Breweries listed under Hillsboro, WI 160

Brewery ID	Brewery Name	Start Date	End Date
WI 160a	<a href="#">Carl Ludwig &amp; Joseph Landsinger Brewery</a>	1870	1874
WI 160b	<a href="#">Frederick Schell Brewery</a>	1874	1890
WI 160c	<a href="#">C. Ludwig &amp; Co. Brewery</a>	1890	1891
WI 160d	<a href="#">Joseph Bezucha Brewery</a>	1891	1913
WI 160e	<a href="#">Hillsboro Brewing Co.</a>	1913	1920
WI 160f	<a href="#">Hutter Brewing Co.</a>	1933	1936
WI 160g	<a href="#">Hillsboro Brewing Co.</a>	1936	1943



Description is an elevated view of the brewery operated by Joseph Buzucha in the early 1900's

[http://www.hillsborobrewingcompany.com/uploads/3/4/5/3/34532867/7114248\\_orig.jpg](http://www.hillsborobrewingcompany.com/uploads/3/4/5/3/34532867/7114248_orig.jpg)



Google

Map data ©2017 Google





<http://www.hillsborobrewingcompany.com/our-beers-our-history.html>

OUR BEERS, OUR HISTORY

(Excerpted from their website)

Hi! For those of you who don't know us, we are Snapper and Kim Verbsky.

Snapper is from Hillsboro and his family has been in Hillsboro for 5 generations.

Snapper's dad, Joe, was a very skilled craftsman with an Artist's talent. Snapper watched his dad turn his craft into a successful trim carpentry business that eventually led him to forgoing a college wrestling career and taking up a father and son partnership in the business.

Snapper has always had pride in his hometown and has been purchasing buildings as they became available and restoring them to their original glory. Such was the case with 815 Water Avenue. The goal was to offer something that wouldn't compete with other successful businesses in town and to create jobs. The idea of a pizzeria was born. That idea evolved to include a brewery too, because Joe had a keen interest in making his own wine and beer. Joe had been working on one recipe for about a year and put the batch to brew when he told Snapper, "well, I think this is it, I think I got it!" That was October 15, 2012. Thursday, October 17, 2012, we got the unbelievable news that Joe had died in a fatal car accident. Our world, as we knew it, had been turned upside down.

The following Wednesday, Joe Beer was brewed and ready, so we raised a glass and took a drink. It was Good! He was right, it is the one... this is Joe Beer...simple...no nonsense, just like Joe was. Snapper has now taken on the role of brewing Joe Beer and Hillsboro Pale Ale; both are unique and excellent brews.

Our state of the art CO2 and Nitrogen mixing system features 8 tappers that deliver a variety of Wisconsin microbrews at an icy 35 Degrees. We also serve top shelf liquors and wines. But that's not all... From American Bistro lunch specials to specialty pizzas, sandwiches, and appetizers, everything we offer is homemade.





And the City Utility customers had not really benefitted from the electric rate reduction. (Unfortunately, Brewer did not explain how he arrived at this conclusion.) Obviously, many more voters accepted Brewer's rationale because he easily won the election, 1,087 votes to Smith's 591.

In early 1934, as another election approached, the *Richland Democrat* observed that thing were "strangely quiet," in terms of the mayor's office. In mid-March the *Democrat* informed potential voters that, "Francis Brewer is to be a candidate for reelection as mayor and his opponent will be L. H. Bancroft. There probably will be no other candidates." Bancroft won the election, but no tally could be found in either weekly newspaper.

In 1936 the local papers carried no pre-election news, beyond reporting that Brewer would challenge Bancroft for the mayor's office. Anton Mueller, a grocer, was a third candidate. In reporting the election results, *The Republican Observer* described the election as "one of the quietest in the history of the city." Brewer won with 622 votes to Bancroft's 579. Mueller ran a distant third, receiving just 327 votes.

So, Bancroft was the mayor when the RECA requested, in late February 1936, that the City Utility supply the farmers' cooperative with power and Brewer was the mayor when most of the controversy arose. When the RECA made its request to Mayor Bancroft and the City Council, the city officials decided to send City Utility Superintendent Rupert Strang and the City Property Committee members to Madison to consult with the Public Service Commission about securing permission to add a 2,500 KWH generator to the municipal plant. The PSC decided, after hearing their presentation, that a 1,500 KWH generator would be sufficient, because "the REA was only a flash in the pan and would collapse of its own weight."! During its 10 March 1936 meeting, with Mayor Bancroft presiding, the Council voted to supply the RECA with electricity at 1.5 cents per KWH and to purchase a 1,000 KWH generator. A professional evaluation of the existing generator and of the proposed REA lines had led to the conclusion that a smaller generator would supply adequate electricity to both the City and the farmers.

*The Republican Observer* (4/16/1936) printed a letter from M. L. Frank, Assistant to the President, Wisconsin Power and Light, to L. H. Bancroft, Mayor, and Members of the Common Council. In his letter, Frank stated that WP & L engineers had studied the City Utility and believed that WP & L could save city residents at least \$7,500.00 per year for the next five years, if the private utility assumed control of the city's power plant. In addition, contracting with WP & L would save the City the \$75 to \$100,000.00 it would need to spend to purchase an additional generator. Attached to this letter was a note from "Mayor Bancroft" arguing that the question of spending "another \$75,000 to \$125,000 in additional equipment" should be submitted to the voters in a referendum. Bancroft declared that he thought the proposed expenditure was "wholly unnecessary." These letters were published after Bancroft had been defeated in the 1936 mayoral election.

The next public episode occurred in early May 1936, when *The Republican Observer* (5/17) carried a letter from the "Richland Center Tax Reduction Committee" to the "Citizens of Richland Center." The Tax Reduction Committee made several negative allegations about the operation of the City (led by Mayor Brewer). The major complaint was that Richland Center residents were heavily taxed, compared to residents of cities of comparable size. And the expenditure of "seventy-five or one hundred thousand dollars of public funds for the expansion of the city's power plant" will only compound the problem. Again, there was a call to hold a referendum on the power plant expenditure. The letter was signed by "D. E. Smith, Chairman (of the) Committee and L. H. Bancroft, Secretary."

*The Republican Observer* continued to carefully follow developments in this ongoing controversy. Its 4 June 1936 issue reported that a hurriedly called meeting of concerned citizens had met to induce ". . . the city council to postpone action in regard to entering into a contract to spend a hundred thousand dollars of the utility fund without more discussion." In the meeting, the concerned citizens had asked whether taxpayers would be better served by spending \$100,000 for expansion or by selling the plant to a public service corporation and getting out of the electric business.

The following issue of the *Observer* reported extensively on a regular and a special city council meeting. L. H. Bancroft had requested the Council to delay action on the generator purchase until a WP & L purchase offer (of \$300,000) could be given further consideration. Then, representatives from each of the three companies that had submitted bids for the "dynamo" addressed the Council to describe why their machine would be the best buy. After hearing the presentations, the councilmen voted to delay a decision until after a special meeting, to be held the following evening. Immediately after this vote, A. V. Miller asked the councilmen to make a firm decision in favor of the expenditure, so that the RECA could proceed with its project, knowing it would have power for its lines.

The next evening, at the outset of the special meeting, Miller repeated his plea for a firm decision. Soon, the motion to delay a decision on purchasing a generator was tabled. Subsequently, the Council voted to purchase a 1,000KWH generator and selected an installer. Also, on page one of the *Observer* a boxed announcement appeared that stated "a large majority of the city citizens oppose selling the electric plant and support buying the needed equipment because the City Utility has the money for the purchase and, thus, no bond issue will be necessary."

One might anticipate that the City Council votes in favor of purchasing and installing an additional generator in the power plant would bring the debate over the issue to a close. That assumption would be wrong, because *The Republican Observer* (6/25/1936) carried yet another communication from the Tax Reduction Committee addressed "To Citizens of Richland Center." In it, the Tax Reduction Committee alleged that the Mayor and Council had "thrown away" an opportunity to secure lower electricity rates, now and for the future; to add a new and important taxpayer (Wisconsin Power and Light) to the tax roll; [continued on pg 7]



to avoid sending a large sum of money out of town to utility equipment interests; and to secure \$300,000 to add to the City's treasury. The Tax Reduction Committee also asserted that the sale of the City Utility to WP & L would have made Richland Center an "endowed city," one with enough income from investing the three hundred thousand dollars to hold down or, perhaps, even to reduce city taxes.

The allegations of misconduct in this communication convinced Mayor Brewer that he had to explain his understanding of events. Brewer did not pull any punches, beginning his letter (*Observer 7/2/1936*) with "I am seriously wondering if this alleged committee is anything more than a mouthpiece for Wisconsin Power and Light." Brewer explained that just 246 citizens had signed the Tax Reduction Committee's petition and that "many had asked that their names be removed once they understood the issues." Far from "rushing" the purchase of a generator, Mayor Brewer and the present Council "merely finished what the old council, who sat with the former mayor (Bancroft) had begun." Brewer explained that the previous city administration had secured permission from the PSC to purchase a generator and had "agreed to furnish the farm cooperative with power." (Underline added) Brewer asserted that WP & L, if it had purchased the local utility, would not pay one dollar in tax that it did not pass on to its customers in higher rates.

Brewer demolished the Tax Reduction Committee's claim that WP & L would honor the City's promise to provide electricity to the REA lines. He wrote, "The only reason Wisconsin Power and Light is now concerned is because that company knows if they can get our plant the farmers will be at their mercy—and don't let anyone tell you that company has any mercy for the farm cooperative movement." Brewer noted that WP & L, over the years it had operated in Richland County, had not shown any interest in building rural lines, until the RECA began to organize!

Finally Mayor Brewer tackled the assertion that the sale of the power plant would have enabled Richland Center to become an "endowed city." He noted that a 6% interest rate had been applied to the purchase price, to yield \$18,000 per year. Well, the current interest rate was only 2%, which would yield just \$6,000. Brewer suggested that the City Utility could easily pay the city coffers an additional \$6,000 annually, from its proceeds, and the city would still own the plant! Brewer ended his argument with, "This plant is more than an endowment fund, it is a live growing business, becoming more valuable every year. If it was not, Wisconsin Power and Light would not want to buy it."

After Brewer's sharp letter was published, the controversy disappeared. Because Richland Center had agreed to supply power to the rural lines at a low rate per KWH, the RECA was enabled to apply for a quarter million dollar loan from the national REA. Meanwhile, other farm cooperative negotiated in vain with private utilities for power at reasonable wholesale rates. In mid-July 1936 A. V. Miller received word that the RECA loan was the first to be approved for Wisconsin. This go-ahead allowed the RECA to solicit bids for installing the lines and transmission equipment. In addition, the RECA advertised for a professional engineer, who would be hired to supervise the project. The local press noted that, with more than one thousand farms enrolled, when the initial project was completed, the supply of electricity in Richland County would increase from 13% of the area to 43% and the County's ranking in the state would rise from forty-first to eighteenth. And, all of this would be accomplished at an estimated cost of \$918.02 per mile, compared to the private utilities' estimate of \$1,250 per mile.

The dedication of the first REA pole took place in Krouskop Park on 7 September 1936. A crowd estimated at several thousand attended and listened to speeches from local, state, and national men about the significance of this first REA project in Wisconsin. Afterward, the project moved forward relentlessly in setting poles, stringing wire, and installing transformers. As the work progressed, more farmers signed up to receive electricity. The farm home of Mr. and Mrs. James Hanold, located west of Richland Center along Highway 14, was the first to be "energized." When the farm home was built, Mr. Hanold had insisted that it be wired, for the day when electricity would be available. His faith was rewarded on 7 May 1937, when the first REA line was powered up. In the excitement of this event, the meter cover had been forgotten. The ever resourceful A. V. Miller cut a temporary cover from cardboard and installed it. It was replaced the next day with the proper cover. This significant event has been memorialized with a historical marker, located along Highway 14, just east of the Hanold farm.

The steady expansion of the RECA lines gradually outgrew the generating capacity of the City Utility. Consequently, in June 1948, the RECA severed its connection to Richland Center and began to receive power from the Dairyland Electric Cooperative generating plant in Genoa.

In 1962, the Richland Electric Cooperative sponsored a twenty-fifth anniversary celebration in the City Auditorium. During it, the late A. V. Miller, Francis Brewer, and Theron Janney were honored for their long service to the REC/REA. In his remarks, Janney said of Miller, "Mr. Miller was a fearless champion of REA and one of the best county agents in Wisconsin." About Brewer, Janney related, "Francis Brewer was the REA's legal advisor. He helped us get easements so we could continue our lines and represented us before the Public Service Commission, combating the private power companies. As Mayor of Richland Center, he persuaded the city-owned power plant to sell to the local REA cooperative power at reasonable rates. I don't know what we would have done without Francis Brewer." Of course, Janney modestly neglected to mention his own pivotal role in organizing and promoting the RECA. At the time of this celebration, Theron Janney was completing his twenty-fifth year as secretary of the organization.

And, to this very day, power flows through electric lines started in 1936 because many men and women had a vision for improving life on the farms and in the villages of Richland County!

*This is a conclusion to the article that appeared in the April, 2017 edition of the AKEY BRAKEY News*



Please renew your membership annually by July 1<sup>st</sup> --- consider the following options:

\_\_\_\_\_ \$5 for an individual / \$8 for a family

\_\_\_\_\_ in addition to a membership consider a \$50 donation

as well as having your name on a plaque of recognition at the Akey School Museum

\_\_\_\_\_ \$ 100 for a LIFETIME individual and/or family membership



## HISTORICAL SOCIETY, Inc.

Members name[s] \_\_\_\_\_

Mail registration to:

Mailing address \_\_\_\_\_

C/o Richland County Historical Society

213 S. Central Ave. Apt. # 1

Richland Center, WI 53581

Optional Phone # \_\_\_\_\_

e-mail contact \_\_\_\_\_

**DONATIONS** are always WELCOME

**PROMOTE  
AND  
SUPPORT  
RICHLAND  
COUNTY  
HISTORY**

Highway 14 East from Richland Center  
Turn right on Twin Bluffs Road  
Go straight on County TB.

**Richland County  
Historical Society**

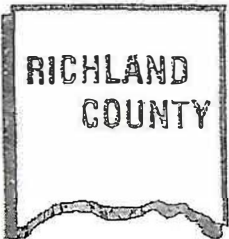
**Akey School Museum**  
Open Sundays  
June thru September 1 to 4 p.m.

For more information contact: [richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com](http://richlandcountyhistoricalsociety.weebly.com)  
[cheide@mwt.net](mailto:cheide@mwt.net)

... would you → pass this newsletter on to a **FRIEND**

MILWAUKEE WI 530

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