

The AKEY BRAKEY News

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DOING BUSINESS WITH KROUSKOP BROTHERS

By Jerry Bower

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

It cannot be determined how Abiel H. acquired his “Doc” nickname. Perhaps it was because he always dressed in all black, thus appearing to be a professional man, such as a doctor. In any case, he was always referred to as “Doc” in conversation.

As described in Part One, Doc and his brother, George, had moved from Sextonville to Richland Center in 1863 to take over operation of Lybrand’s Store, which they had purchased. Their move took place in the midst of the Civil War, 1861-65. Doc was eighteen when the conflict began and was, therefore, of prime age to become a Union soldier, either by volunteering or being conscripted. However, he avoided the draft by paying the \$28.00 substitute fee that Richland County had adopted. The County used this fee “to Hire” another man to take Doc’s place in the army.

Doc, of course, continued the Krouskop Store operation after his brother opened a bank in 1870. In 1873 Krouskops had sales of about \$150,000, including both retail (\$76,584) and wholesale (\$72,727) transactions. This was the leading amount among all Richland Center merchants. (Scott 51-2)

Doc joined other village merchants in investing in the Pine River and Stevens Point Railroad, which the state chartered in 1871. As a major investor Doc was elected vice president of the company when it was organized. This little branch line, from Richland Center to Lone Rock, as described in Part One, gave a great boost to Richland County’s commerce.

During 1877 Doc had a grand store constructed on the northwest corner of Center and Seminary Streets, directly across Seminary from the Courthouse. Margaret Scott wrote that it was, “the finest store building that Richland Center has ever had and in fact the finest in the state at that time . . .” (56) Tragically, just five years after it opened, a fire totally destroyed Krouskop’s Store and two adjacent buildings that Doc owned. The small hand-powered pumper of the volunteer fire department was not powerful enough to throw water onto the roof of the burning building. Some stock was rescued by firemen and citizens, who carried it across Seminary and dumped it into the snow on the Courthouse yard. Afterward, investigators concluded that the fire had started in the chimney. Doc’s loss was estimated at \$65,000, of which \$45,000 was covered by several insurance companies. In George’s bank, on the second floor of the store, his heavy safe protected the bank records. Within a day George was back in business. Within a week Doc, also, was again buying produce, which he stored in Chandler’s Hall, located across Center Street from the burned out store.

Very soon Doc began to build another store, on the original site. This one was not as grand as its predecessor. Carl Burdick, in his *My Home Town*, his recollections of growing up in Richland Center in the early 20th century, included a detailed description of the rebuilt Krouskop Store. The very corner of the original site, where the Eskin Theater sits today, was not rebuilt. Instead, a solid wooden platform was placed there.

At the west end of the platform, a storage shed was constructed, so that items displayed for sale on the platform could be locked up overnight. Frank Haas, who was in charge of this area of the store, each morning rolled out a farm wagon, rock salt on a dolly, rolls of barbed wire, and a variety of farm implements. The very last item brought out was a cage of badgers that, hopefully, attracted customers, in addition to city children, like Carl Burdick, who often played beneath the platform. He wrote that it was relatively dry under it, even on a rainy day. The new store, itself, had two sections. The section next to the platform contained the hardware items and the office. Next door, to the north, was the clothing and general merchandize.

Shortly after the rebuilt store opened, Doc decided to reorganize the mercantile portion of his business, by forming A. H. Krouskop & Co. Doc remained, by far, the major investor, but he invited two clerks in the store, Charles S. Craig and Lou McCollum, to invest. Both accepted the opportunity but McCollum sold his interest back to Doc within a few years. C. S. Craig, on the other hand, stayed with the firm for forty-two years, retiring in 1928.

The story of Charles Sumner Craig is, in itself, very interesting. In 1855 William Craig, Charles' father, was working for the Milwaukee Road in Jefferson County. One day the section manager inquired whether anyone would be interested in going to Lone Rock, then the end of the line, to be the depot agent. William volunteered and moved to Lone Rock to staff the freight car that served as the depot. Charles S. was born in Lone Rock, 26 December 1856. A few years later, William moved his family to Valton, Sauk County, and opened a general store. William bought and accepted in trade farm produce and ginseng, which was grown profusely in the area. William regularly marketed his produce and ginseng in Richland Center, often dealing with Doc Krouskop.

When he became a teen, Charles was trusted to haul the loads to Richland Center. He did a good job protecting the family's interests in these transactions. Charles noticed that the farm women around Valton knit many pairs of woolen mittens to trade at the family store. Charles suggested that his father acquire as many pairs as possible and Charles would peddle them for a profit in Richland Center. His idea worked well. During all these exchanges, Doc had taken notice of this ambitious young man. Consequently, in 1876 Doc asked Charles if he would like to work for him. Charles accepted, advanced rapidly, and ten years later became a partner in A. H. Krouskop & Co.

The reason Doc reorganized his mercantile business is that he had ventured into broader areas of commerce. In 1882 he built a sawmill on the east bank of the Pine River, west of Main Street and south of the depot, on Seminary Street. Ten years later, after a fire claimed that mill, Doc rebuilt, and greatly expanded his lumber operation. The new sawmill was 120' X 130'. A 50' X 25' engine room contained a 250 horsepower Corliss engine that powered the machines; right next door was a same size boiler room that produced steam for the engine and heat for the kiln. Nest to the mill also was a 35' X 13' shavings room. The shavings were sold to the city and homeowners to place on the streets and sidewalks to soak up the mud and make travel a bit more comfortable. All of these new building were constructed of brick, an attempt to reduce the danger of fire.

Continued on the insert

THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER *By Jerry Bower*

I hope that many of you attended the Grand Opening of the Akey School Museum on Saturday, June 4th. The Directors had decided to try a Saturday, rather than a Sunday, for the event, in hopes of improving attendance.

It worked! Over 100 came for the lunch that was offered for sale and about 70 were present for the panel of former one-room school teachers, who shared some of their experiences in conducting these citadels of education. The teachers were Shirley Braithwaite, Carolyn Freeman, Rosemary Kidd, and Jerry Shaw. The weather was beautiful, which no doubt, contributed to the successful occasion.

On July 30th, a very hot Saturday afternoon (weren't all July afternoons hot?!), about 40 people visited Kent Houck's Fancy Creek Technology Museum. Kent has a fantastic collection, which is expertly displayed. Despite the temperature, all of us enjoyed viewing exhibits.

{ Note the collage of pictures taken by Carole Troxel on the insert page featuring some of the collection }

Perhaps we can schedule another visit next summer.

That's all for this time. I hope you enjoy this issue of the AKEY BRAKEY News.

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Carl Burdick, whose father was in charge of the mill's steam engine, described the mill in some detail. The mill had a high-pitched roof to allow space for overhead shafts, pulleys, and belts. Machines were turned on and off by moving their belts on or off of a pulley. The mill had huge sliding doors that allowed a team and wagon to drive inside to load the sawn lumber to take it outside to stack along the Pine, where it would air dry. However, the maple and oak used to manufacture Krouskop's famous flooring was dried in a brick kiln because the moisture content needed to be precise to produce floor boards that wouldn't warp.

In addition to his in-town businesses, Doc acquired by 1900 about 2,000 acres of farmland. James "Jim" Keegan, who had begun clerking in his uncle's store in the early 1880s, was in charge of managing both the farms and the Krouskop stockyard. He also supervised the large horse barn, located south of the lumber yard, where the horses for the many Krouskop operations were kept.

In the Fall of 1888, workmen began to erect poles and string wire to connect a phone line between Doc's office in his store and his sawmill, horse barn, and the farm just outside the city. In those days, if you needed a phone, you supplied your own equipment. But, the telephone was such a useful instrument that Richland Center was soon connected to the "outside world." In 1896 D. C. "Doc" McCollum, of Twin Bluffs, strung a line of seven miles length to Richland Center. The following year the Eagle Telephone Company line connected the city to Lone Rock. Now, one could call anywhere. The telephone sped up business operations because one could have an immediate answer to a proposal. Up until now, negotiations had been conducted by telegraph.

By 1900 Doc Krouskop had built a feed mill and warehouse on Haseltine Street, between Central Avenue and Main Street. (Center Street had been renamed Central Avenue.) Carl Burdick reports that Doc had screens installed on all feed mill and warehouse doors and windows, so that birds couldn't eat the profits. In succeeding years the feed operation was expanded until it filled the entire block. (This is where the Consumers Cooperative Mill was formerly located.)

As the richest man in the City and County, Doc's support was sought for community projects. The Federation of Woman's Clubs, for example, solicited his backing during their 1910-11 campaign to convince the City Council to build a modern municipal building, including a community auditorium. According to the Federation minutes, the visit was a success. A decade later the Federation again enlisted Doc in its drive to get a hospital built in Richland Center. This time, however, the Council refused to get involved and the Richland Hospital was eventually built by a joint-stock company, whose shares were purchased by local citizens. In 1925 Doc donated fifteen acres to the City for a park, which, bears his name and still exists today.

Abiel H. "Doc" Krouskop died of old age 2 April 1930, just three months short of his ninetieth birthday. Since Doc had never married, there was great interest in the disposition of Richland Center's first millionaire's estate. The final tally was \$1,550,538.99. Inheritance taxes claimed \$209,330. According to his will, after several small bequests were made, his nephews, Judge William McCorkle, who had resigned as county judge in 1920 to manage Doc's legal affairs, and Jim Keyes, each received one-third of the estate. The remaining one-third was divided equally between Carl Barnes, who had been Krouskop's bookkeeper for decades, and dentist Dr. Elmer McCollum, another nephew.

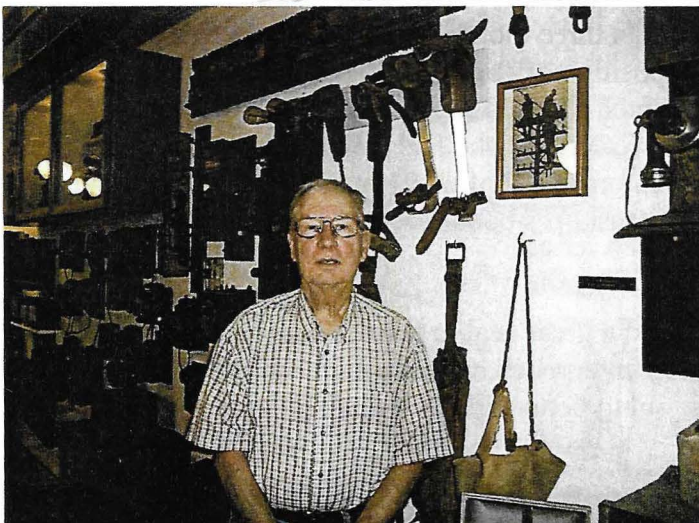
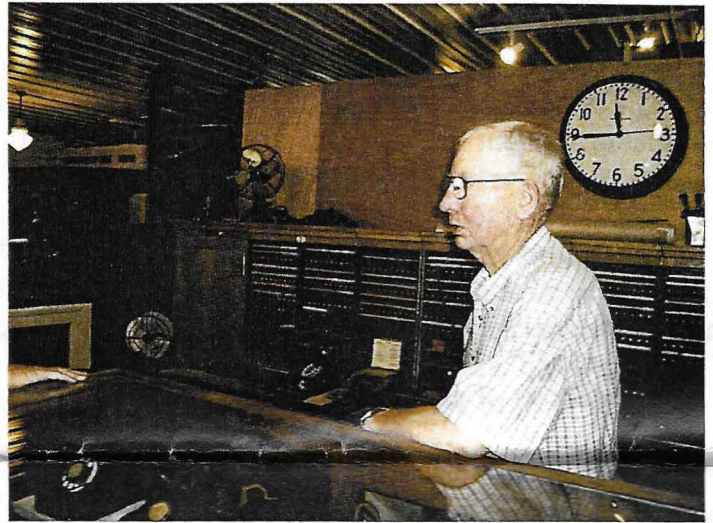
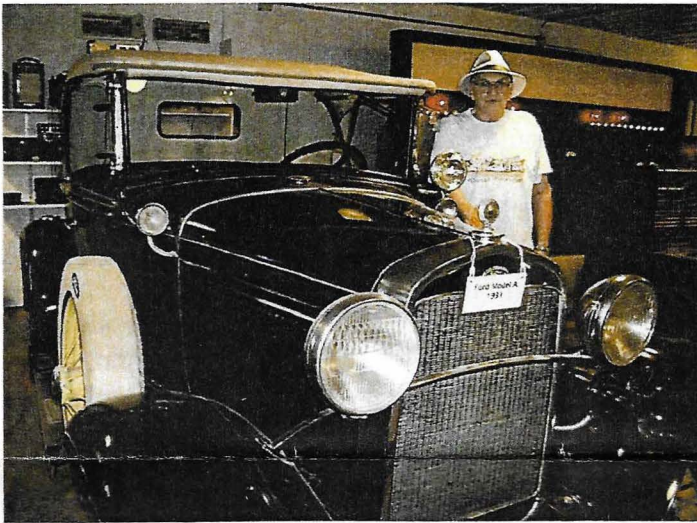
The Krouskop brothers, George and Abiel, had contributed a great deal to the development of Richland Center's commerce. The McCorkle heirs operated the Krouskop enterprises until the mid 1980s, when they reluctantly closed the businesses. Krouskop's had, at last, lost out to better financed national competitors.

--THE END--

[Part one of the two-part article about the two Krouskop brothers, George and Abiel H. "Doc," who were important pioneer businessmen appeared in the April, 2011 edition of the AKEY BrAKEY News]

Pictures of Kent Houck's Fancy Creek Technology Museum

Pictures taken by Carole Troxel



Richland Center Historic Walkabouts

The most recent walking tour of the area around downtown Richland Center took place during Centerfest Weekend on Oct. 1st. The 'Walkabouts', as they are called, have been utilized to support the Richland County Room to record and promote the heritage of Richland County. This outing started at the Bowen House and was to include the Post Office, Masonic Temple, City Hall & Auditorium, Park Hotel, Courthouse & Jail, Pier Building and Opera House, the Union Block, the Edwards Block, H.T. Bailey Store and Opera House, First National Bank, Richland County Bank, as well as the A.H. Kroskup Mansion and the A.D. German Warehouse amongst other notable locations. In a previous edition of the "AKEY BrAKEY News" there was a promotion of the Walking Tour pamphlet that can be obtained at The Depot if anyone is interested.

Supporting the Richland Heritage Project

The Richland County Historical Society has contributed another \$500 to advance the efforts of preserving the history in the Richland County area. Dr. Aharon Zorea began the project in 2007. The work includes digitizing historical photos, collecting and archiving oral histories and preserving history from Richland County. This portion is focused on the oral history aspect. Information on this project can be obtained by contacting Dr. Zorea at the UW-Richland.

“Celebrating Generations of Women at St. John's”

“Serving God for 90 Years, From Ladies Aid to Women of the ELCA”

By Carletta Heide

On September 22, 1921, the Ladies Aid Society was organized in the home of Mrs. Otilie (William) Schumacher, during the pastorate of Rev. C. Bosholm. First officers were president, Mrs. Emma (Frank) Kolman; vice-president, Mrs. Mary (James) Pauls; secretary, Mrs. Emma (Arthur) Pauls; treasurer, Mrs. William Bliesner. Fifteen ladies signed the constitution, and of those charter members, Mrs. Emma Pauls and Mrs. J.M. Mayfield were active in the Society in 1949, when St. John's celebrated its 90th anniversary. First meetings were held in various homes, but increased membership led to meeting in the church basement. Purposes of the Society were to foster Christian fellowship among its members, to perform works of charity, and to provide for the adornment of the church.

I am particularly interested in this group of women because Mrs. Otilie Jesse Schumacher and Mrs. Emma Jesse Kolman were sisters of my great grandfather, Emil Jesse. Mrs. Emma Jesse Pauls was my grandmother. Mrs. Mary Pauls was my great grandmother. Mrs. Bliesner was not a relative but must have been a family friend, because I have her picture, as a young woman.

On February 20, 1947, the Dorcas Society became the arm of the American Lutheran Church Women's Missionary Federation in St. John's.

On January 7, 1960, the final Ladies Aid meeting was held, as the Ladies Aid Society and the Dorcas Society merged to become The Women of the Church.

Women had always been active in the church, since 1859, but the formal organization occurred in 1921, thus, 2011 is being recognized as the 90th anniversary.

A celebratory afternoon tea was held Saturday, October 15, 2011, at 1:00 p.m. in the fellowship hall. The theme for the tea program was "Serving Others: From Tying Aprons to Tying Quilts."

Attendees wore aprons. Aprons were provided for guests who did not have one. Tea and refreshments were served on china. Guests brought a household item that had special meaning to them, and told about it during the "Precious Memories" portion of the program. I gave a brief history entitled, "It's All In The Minutes." I also did introductions of descendants of the charter members and recognition of organization members and their leadership contributions.

Tea refreshments included Prairie Passion tea, ribbon sandwiches, lemon bars with a red raspberry, confetti cookies, orange shortbread, chocolate or carrot truffles, cranberry pecan tarts, cherry almond or pineapple orange scones, fresh fruit tarts, lemon curd, Devonshire cream, raspberry jam, and lemon slices.