

The Quarterly Bulletin of the
Ripley County, Indiana, Historical Society, Inc.
Library – 125 Washington Street
Museum – Corner of Main and Water Streets
Versailles, Indiana 47042

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NUMBER 1

▲ The Ripley Co. Historical Society will meet Sunday January 10, at 2:00 at the Archive Library on the west side of Versailles Courthouse Square. The program for our next meeting is DVD on the Proving Ground.

▲ The WWII Veterans book Update. Our new book honoring and remembering Ripley County WWII Veterans arrived mid-November and has been in great demand. RCHS has received many, many positive comments. Many books have been given as Christmas gifts. The book is a 368 page, hard back with brief biographies for most of the 3200 veterans listed and many with pictures. Titled **LEST WE FORGET**, it also has a brief history of the war and information about Ripley County during that period. It can be obtained for \$35 at (1) Batesville Historical Society which is located on George Street next to the Post Office (during its open hours), (2) the Osgood Museum on South Buckeye Street (on Friday or Saturday afternoons) or in Versailles at the Ripley County Historical Society Library on the west side of the Courthouse Square (open every weekday afternoon from 1 to 4). Also, **LEST WE FORGET** can be ordered for shipment by mail for \$40. Checks should be made payable to Ripley County Historical Society. We give our heartfelt thanks to Joan and Norris Krall. They did an excellent job!

▲ Members that are willing to receive the newsletter via email instead of postal mailing can do so by emailing RCHS with your request along with your email address. The email for sending your request is printed above.

▲ Cheryl Welch and Owen Menchhofer has requested that members pay their dues by the end of February or you will not receive a newsletter. The reason for this is to make bookkeeping easier for Owen. Membership for the year begins January 1 and ends December 31, therefore, when one pays the latter part of the year, they do not get their money's worth as a member for that year.

The RCHS Archives Library is open for public research weekdays 1 – 4 pm, except holidays, Pumpkin Show week (Sept.), also the week before and between Christmas and New Years. The Library will also be closed during inclement weather. Questions call 812-689-3031

Mail your renewal for 2010 to RCHS at P.O. Box 525, Versailles, IN 47042

Dues: Annual \$10; Life \$100.

THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE:

<i>Ripley County History, Volume 1</i>	\$65	<i>Versailles, IN School Life 1818-1966</i>	\$ 20
<i>Brown Twp. Tales</i> by Alan Smith	20	<i>Osgood, IN Sesquicentennial 1856-2006</i>	17
<i>Tales of Versailles</i> by Alan Smith	16	<i>Come Visit</i> by Jean McClellan	25
<i>Vintage Postcards</i> by Alan Smith	20	<i>Jackson Township Cemetery Index</i>	13
<i>Brown Township Cemetery Index</i>	10	<i>Johnson Township Cemetery Index</i>	10
<i>Milan, Indiana, A Storied Past</i>	16	<i>The Life of A Centenarian</i> by Ethel Mathias	35
<i>Broken Wings</i> , By Robert Kelly	20	<i>Lest We Forget</i> WWII	35
Shipping Charges added for all books	5		

RIPLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MINUTES

October 11, 2009

The autumn quarterly meeting of the Society was called to order by President Cheryl Welch on October 11, 2009, at 2:00 p.m. Cheryl led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance. Each of the 23 attendees, as requested by President Welch, identified themselves by name and township of residence. Secretary Frank Keenan read the minutes of the summer quarterly meeting of Sunday July 12, 2009, which were approved as read. Treasurer Owen Menchhofer's financial report was distributed amongst those in attendance and approved by attendees as prepared.

President Welch reported that the Society had purchased a new copier. The Society also purchased a new printer/scanner for the computer.

President Welch was especially pleased to announce that, after two and one half years' worth of work, Norris and Joan Krall announced that the book commemorating the service of the County's World War 11 veterans, entitled "Lest We Forget," has been completed. The first copies of the book will be available for \$35.00 per book, shipping and handling extra. Once again, stated Cheryl, the Society notes its great appreciation and gratitude to the Kralls for their dogged persistence and effort in bringing this book project to a singularly successful conclusion.

President Welch announced that she would be opening the Museum for a visit by approximately eighty (80) fourth grade students. Workers are still needed at the Archives Building on weekdays to assist patrons seeking information from the Society's Genealogical, and other archives. Cheryl asked that volunteers contact her if interested in assisting the present members who now volunteer at the Archives Building.

Still further with respect to books, Cheryl announced that copies of Ethel Mathias's book, Life of a Centenarian are now on sale here and at the Tyson Library.

President Welch, on behalf of the Society, announced and welcomed Mike Stratton as the new County Historian, replacing Helen Einhaus, who has long held the position and discharged its many duties in excellent fashion. Cheryl also announced that Sandy Meisberger has accepted the position of Director-at-Large.

Members of the Society were advised that the Society's white house next to the Museum was slated to be demolished. It has been in disrepair for quite some time and relatively recent and expensive repairs have been insufficient to halt the building's deterioration. There being no further business to come before the membership, the business meeting was closed.

Following the business meeting the program was given by Dana Olsen, author of a fascinating text entitled, Prince Madoc and the White Indians, which was purchased by several members of the Society. Author Olsen related the fascinating legend and tradition that the New World of the Americas was first discovered by a Welchman circa 1170 A.D. who first made landfall near Mobile (Alabama) Bay, and from there moved northward through the continent's extensive river systems, allegedly building stone fortifications along the way. Prince Madoc's Hoosier connection consists of evidence supporting the tradition that in Clark County at the falls of the Ohio a great battle occurred on Corn Island, between Native American tribesmen and some "White Indians," the descendents of Prince Madoc. Johnson Township will be responsible for refreshments for the winter meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Frank A. Keenan, Secretary

STEPHEN S. HARDING

Information in this article was taken from the Book "Ripley County's Antislavery Movement" written by Diane Perrine Coon with Helen Einhaus doing the research.

Stephen S. Harding was born February 24, 1808. His parents were David and Abigail Harding. The Harding family came to Ripley County in 1820 and settled at Old Milan in Franklin Township when Stephen was 12 years old.

Stephen went to school at Aurora and when he was 16 years old, he taught school at Old Milan for \$7.00 a month plus boarding. He gave his first public speech to his neighbors at Old Milan when he was 17 years old. He also started law school that year at Brookville. He walked back and forth on week-ends which were about 30 miles. In September 1827, he passed the bar and practiced at Richmond, Indiana where he had very few clients.

In 1828, Stephen went to New Orleans planning to practice law. He saw the slave markets at Vicksburg and New Orleans and was horrified at the brutality of the slaves. He didn't stay very long. He came back to Indiana.

The year 1829, Stephen went to visit relatives in New York where he met Avoline Sprout. They married in 1830 and resided in Ripley County. Stephen was appointed Ripley County Attorney that year. He started subscribing to anti-slavery literature. He became very knowledgeable on the issues of slavery.

In 1833, Stephen Harding presented a speech attacking intemperance which was popular among parishioners of churches. Stephen also said that slavery was as much ravage to society as intemperance. The attack on slavery was not popular in Ripley County. Many people either owned slaves themselves or had relatives that owned slaves. Many believed that slavery was the choice of each state to decide.

In 1834, Harding gave a passionate speech at Old Milan asking citizens to eradicate slavery. He bought 80 acres close by that became part of the Underground Railroad. Harding opened a store and became the first postmaster of Old Milan in 1835. His law practice improved and his office was located on Adams Street near the corner of First North Street.

Stephen and Avoline had seven children. Two of those were twins born in 1836, which one died at 1 year old in 1837. The same year Stephen's father died of old age. In 1838 two sisters died within hours of each other from Typhoid Fever.

Between 1837 and 1840 Stephen acquired 630 acres of land. In 1838, he built a steam-grist and saw mill at Old Milan behind his house. It burned in 1840 and he rebuilt the mill larger. He hauled timber to Aurora to ship to New Orleans. He became acquainted with William Wymond, manufacturer at Aurora who was vice president of Indiana Anti Slavery Society. Three routes came north from Aurora in the Underground Railroad operation. Stephen Harding's home at Old Milan became a Station on one of the routes. Meanwhile Stephen broke with the Whig Party because its anti-slavery plank was too weak.

In 1840 Stephen ran for office as a candidate for Lt. Governor of Indiana on the Liberty Party ticket. He supported William Henry Harrison for president in 1839-40. Harding worked with others to expand the Liberty Party, dedicated to eliminating slavery. Most anti-slavery people were not willing to throw their vote away on a long shot Third Party. Harding lost the election. It was a battle to convince people to back a new anti-slavery political party.

In 1844, Harding claimed the Freewill Baptists, Radical Methodists, and Quakers were all bold, outspoken, anti-slavery men, but all the other churches were pro-slavery. In June 1844, Stephen announced at a public address to be given at the Courthouse at Versailles. He arrived by horseback with a few friends only to find a large, hostile crowd with guns and clubs assembled determined not to let Harding speak. A black flag hung on the courthouse, and three sides were draped with strips of black muslin with words, "Treason, Treason, the Union

this day dissolved by abolitionists". Threats of violence were easily heard. Harding faced the crowd and standing on the courthouse steps made his speech.

"Who am I? And in what country am I? Why do you stand here with loaded guns in your hands charged with missiles of death? Why do you look on me as if I were a criminal and an outlaw in my country? What have I done to challenge your hate and displeasure? It was not so once. I have partaken of your hospitalities at your homes, and you have partaken of mine. Am I not an American citizen? May I not exercise the sacred rights that are secured to me by the constitution of your county...the rights of liberty and of free speech? Contemplate the despotism that would cover all this land as with the pall of death if these sacred and God-given rights were stricken down. Is there a man before me who will stand idly by and see this wrong done to the humblest citizen?"

His words had a magnetic effect on the audience. Women muttered, "Let him speak." A young man said, "This is a damned shame," and ran forward to the courthouse, and a couple of moments later opened the door from the inside to invite Stephen Harding inside. That man was Jonathan W. Gordon, later to become one of the most distinguished attorneys in Indiana. George A. Roberts stated that many minds were changed that day.

County, Indiana, Historical

Ripley



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