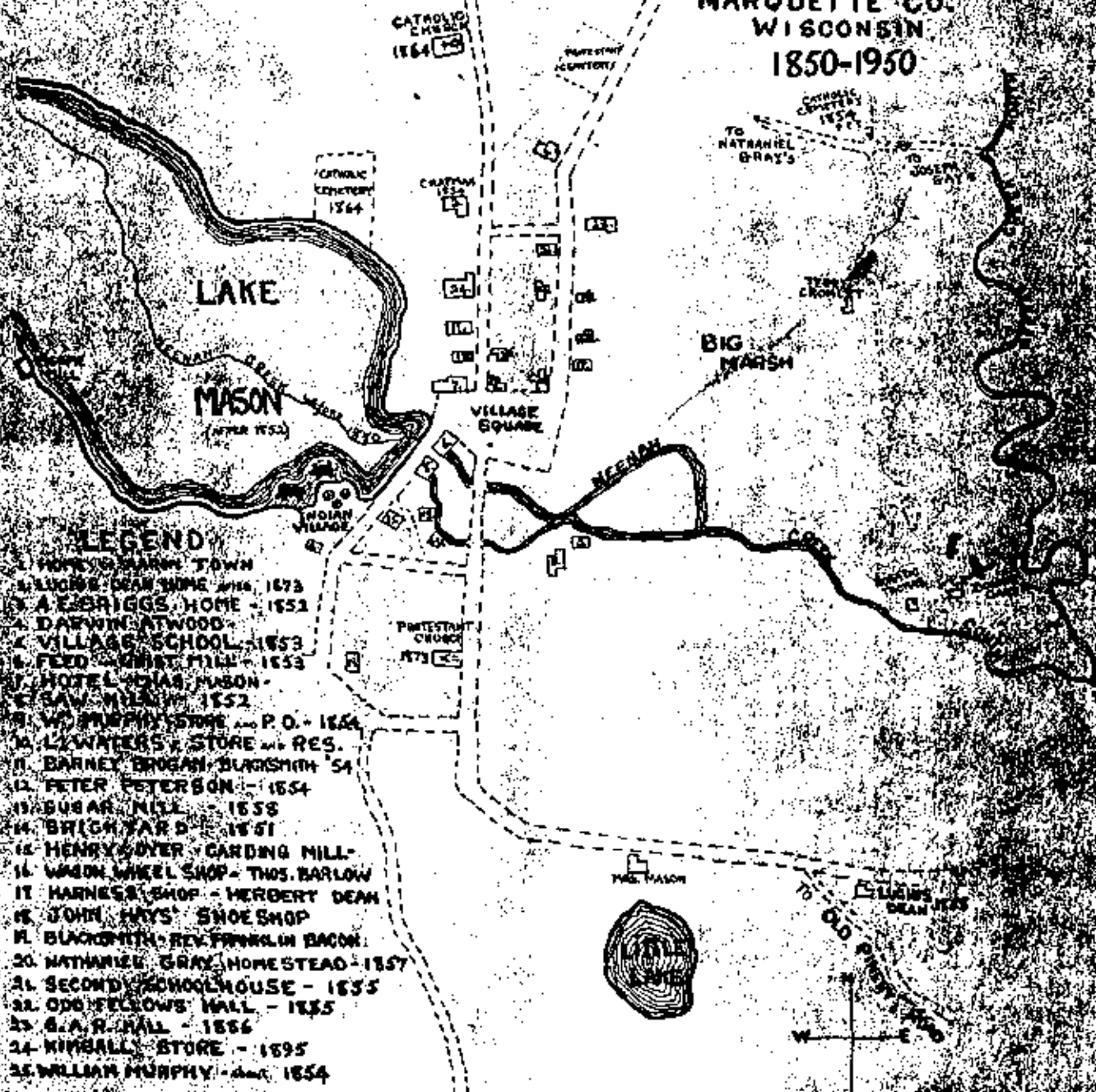


THE EARLY DAYS OF  
**BRIGGSVILLE**  
 MARQUETTE CO.  
 WISCONSIN  
 1850-1950



**LEGEND**

- 1 HOME OF EARLY TOWN
- 2 LUCAS DEAN HOME - 1873
- 3 A. BRIGGS HOME - 1852
- 4 DARWIN ATWOOD
- 5 VILLAGE SCHOOL - 1853
- 6 FEED - WHEAT MILL - 1853
- 7 HOTEL MASON
- 8 SAW MILL - 1852
- 9 W. MURPHY STORE AND P.O. - 1854
- 10 L. WATERS STORE AND RES.
- 11 BARNEY BROWN BLACKSMITH '54
- 12 PETER PETERSON - 1854
- 13 SUGAR MILL - 1858
- 14 BRIGH YARD - 1851
- 15 HENRY DYER CARDING MILL
- 16 WAGON WHEEL SHOP - THOS. BARLOW
- 17 HARNESS SHOP - HERBERT DEAN
- 18 JOHN HAYS SHOE SHOP
- 19 BLACKSMITH - REV. FRANKLIN BACON
- 20 NATHANIEL GRAY HOMESTEAD - 1857
- 21 SECOND SCHOOLHOUSE - 1853
- 22 OGDEN FELLOWS HALL - 1855
- 23 G.A.R. HALL - 1886
- 24 KIMBALL STORE - 1895
- 25 WILLIAM MURPHY - about 1854



This small work is lovingly dedicated to the memory of the intrepid pioneers of the early Briggsville region, with the hope that new frontiers of interest in making "One World" and maintaining it in peace will be as eagerly pioneered by their descendants.

The facts contained herein have been compiled by Carla Lovesy and Marie Beyer, with the aid of Katharine Green (who also drew the map), the folks 'round about, and the Briggsville and Big Spring Telephone Company! Any errors or omissions are entirely unintentional, and for them we beg the Reader's indulgence.

## THE EARLY DAYS OF BRIGGSVILLE, MARQUETTE COUNTY, WISCONSIN

On a bright day in January, 1850, an ox-team drawing a heavily loaded sleigh, plodded slowly along a narrow woods road hewn out of the pine and hardwood forest that stretched without a break on either side. A light snow had fallen the night before, and the dazzling flakes on pine branches and roadsides made a fairy-land of the Wisconsin wilderness.

The stillness was broken only by an occasional snort from the oxen or the whirr of a grouse as it took to flight from the terrifying apparition on the road. Squirrels chattered protests from their oaken lodges. Once an antlered buck stepped into the clearing a few rods ahead of the sleigh, threw up his head in amazement at the strange odor which assailed his nostrils, and with a bound of indescribable grace disappeared into the thicket beyond the road. Bluejays screamed and the rat-tat-tat of the woodpecker echoed sharply to startle the attentive ears of the four occupants of the sleigh who sat, surrounded by their piled-up belongings, obviously unable to move because of their many wrappings.

As the afternoon shadows lengthened to make deep blue traceries in the snow the sleigh climbed a generous rise from which the travelers looking back, as the oxen stopped to rest, glimpsed a long, gently-rolling range of high hills a few miles to the South, now purple in the late-afternoon shadows beyond the blue-and-white wilderness of forest and snow. An exclamation of delighted surprise broke from the mummy-like figure beside the driver, and a woman's voice commented that the view was as beautiful as York State or Vermont, except that the spaces were wider.

The man behind her moved his wrappings to lay his arm across the shoulders of the young lad beside him and remarked that it was "fine country, and good hunting for a boy."

The driver raised his arm and touched the lead-ox, and the beasts started

slowly on their way down the other side of the hill, where a clearing soon appeared and a woman stepped out of her log cabin to peer eagerly at the passers-by. The driver called to her that he would stop the next day on his return to Portage City, and she turned quickly, after responding with a wave of her arm, and disappeared within the cabin.

A mile or so farther on, the road gradually descended into a bottom-land of birch and pine, and presently came within view of a long, narrow snow-covered body of water. They continued on for several minutes until a clearing appeared directly in front of them. As the sound of the ox-hoofs announced the arrival of the sleigh, a shout went up from behind the large low-lying log house built near the shore. Immediately the door opened and a large dog rushed out, followed by a young boy and a woman who threw a shawl about her head and shoulders as she stepped down towards the sleigh. Two men appeared at the same time from the region of the log farm buildings behind the house, and greeted the newcomers warmly. The occupants of the sleigh climbed stiffly from their places and the entire company disappeared within the house. The ox-team, as if accustomed to the procedure, walked slowly around the house towards the barn, accompanied by the dog.

The new comers besides the ox-team "Liveryman" from Portage City, were Amplus Chamberlain, his wife and son, who had traveled out the Old Pinery Road that January day in 1850, enroute from Elkhorn, to a new life in the Wisconsin wilderness. The cabin on the Big Slough belonged to Silas Walsworth. Silas had come to Portage in 1837 by steamboat, and established a trading post for furs and two meeting houses in Portage. He also built this log house to which the travelers had come. In summer he operated a ferry on the Wisconsin River. The older of the two men who came out to greet the travelers was one Jonathan Butterfield who made his home at Walsworth's but had laid claim to large holdings in the vicinity, as well as several miles away, where Baraboo now stands.

Silas Walsworth was a hospitable man, and his large cabin at the far end of the Old Pinery Road was the scene that night of the kind of good cheer which

only the early settlers could adequately describe, from the roaring fires in the two fireplaces, to the bountiful meal of venison, squirrel and partridge, corn-meal cakes, and scalding tea which the women sipped while the men partook, also, of stronger brews and talked and talked far into the star-splendid January night.

They talked about the possibilities of the region, and Amplus Chamberlain became more and more convinced from what he heard that here was a locality where he might like to try his fortunes. Accordingly he set out with Butterfield the next morning for a point approximately two miles northwest of Walsworth's clearing. They traveled slowly, on snowshoes made for them by Winnebago Indians, since there was no road beyond Walsworth's at the end of the Old Pinery Road.

Coming, at length, to a small break in the wilderness of tamarack on their left, Jonathan Butterfield pointed out a snow-covered area which lay within his claim and which he called his LITTLE LAKE. In Summer, he said, it was the prettiest spot in the country, and he hoped they would bury him near it when he died. (His wish was fulfilled a scant two years later.)

Shortly, they followed the trail down a gentle incline to the banks of a small river which flowed gracefully between high banks of oak on the South and a marshy bower of cat-tails and rushes to the North. The "creek", fed by many hidden springs a few miles to the west, flowed dark between the banks of sparkling snow in spite of the severe cold. Jonathan Butterfield stopped there a moment to explain that only in the sharpest weather did the ice cover it completely, and then not for long because of the considerable current.

Soon they stood upon a piece of level ground, heavily wooded on either side but looking westward across an expanse of marsh and bog through which the dark stream meandered merrily in the sunlight. To their left, among the trees which came down to the marsh's edge, stood a group of ten or fifteen strange-looking structures resembling the skeletons of beehives, evidently long sapling poles, bent, with their ends planted firmly in the ground, and the whole domed at the top to form circular

structures about eight feet in height. Those, explained Jonathan Butterfield, were covered with deerskins or wide strips of bark in summer and inhabited by a group of friendly Winnebago Indians who fished and trapped throughout the vicinity. They had joined a larger group to the north, for the winter, where they held festivals and dances periodically. On a still night, he said, you could hear their tom-toms calling the young braves to dance, and dance they often did until the dawn.

Pointing to a large, low-lying mound of irregular outline in the snow before them, he explained to Amplus Chamberlain that it was an Indian mound in the shape of a turtle. Another one, farther on, appeared to be an elephant, or possibly a bear. They were used, he thought in the Indians' religious ceremonies.

The swift-moving stream called NEENAH -- (Winnebago for "water") -- with its skeleton village near by, the long expanse of marsh, the gently sloping ground on either side must have fired the imagination of sturdy Amplus Chamberlain that sunlit day, for by nightfall he had arranged in his imagination to invest in the fortunes of the Butterfield claim for the purpose of harnessing the water-power and erecting a mill at the edge of that swampy clearing. There was jubilation in his heart as he lay on the corn-husk mattress in Silas Walsworth's cabin that night and watched, through a small glazed window high up under the eaves, the Northern Lights shimmering and glowing in a celebration all for his benefit. He had part of the money for his venture, and he would find a partner to share his enthusiasm, for settlers were moving in from the New England states at a rapid rate that year. He fell asleep wondering just how much power the NEENAH CREEK would have----and the history of the white population of BRIGGSVILLE, Town of Douglas, Marquette County, Wisconsin had begun!

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The claim to the south of Neenah Creek and including the land surrounding Little Lake was Jonathan Butterfield's. To the north of the Creek much of the land had been claimed by one Aaron Town who had returned to New Hampshire the fall before

to bring his family west. The first concern of Amplus Chamberlain was, therefore, to provide suitable quarters for his family, since the big log house of Silas Walsworth could accommodate only a limited number. A log house was, accordingly, built on the south side of the stream near the Indian camp. Another was built on the site of what was later the hotel, and to this cabin there came, in the fall of 1850, Alexander Ellis Briggs of Shoreham, Vermont with a group of homesteaders from that vicinity.

A. E. Briggs became the partner that Amplus Chamberlain dreamed of, and in a very short time the two men had negotiated with Jonathan Butterfield and Aaron Town for the right to build a dam across Neenah Creek to provide water-power for a mill. Besides giving the new settlement the name of Briggsville, Alexander Briggs had given it a purpose. He then returned to Vermont to bring his family to the new holdings, leaving Amplus Chamberlain, no doubt, to marshal the forces which would result in the early completion of the dam and the building of the sawmill which was to supply the early settlers with boards for their houses. The dam was built with two flumes---to the north and the south---and the sawmill finished in 1852 was built at the south flume. Here the first lumber manufactured was some heavy oak plank and joists to be used in building the first jail erected at Portage City. The lumber was taken on a flatboat down the Neenah Creek to the Fox River and thence up the Fox to Ft. Winnebago which lay just outside the small frontier town.

The dam, which was commenced that fall of 1850 made a lake to the westward about three miles in length. To this lake was given the name of Mason for the carpenter who built the mill and was also the first hotel owner of Briggsville --- Charles Mason. Beneath the waters of Lake Mason sleep the giant Indian mounds which Jonathan Butterfield and Amplus Chamberlain gazed upon that bright January morning in 1850.

Aaron Town arrived to take up his claim in March of 1850. He lived first in a log house on the hill where Tyley Champeny now lives. At that time the

Government had not completed the subdivision of land into sections, and all that one had to do was to claim what one could see from some high point, mark the corners, blaze a line around it, build a "claim shanty" and live upon the claim within a certain time, being careful not to encroach upon another's holdings. With the Towns had come Robert Thompson and H. S. Thomas with their families. Mr. Thompson claimed what is now the Russell Davison farm and Horatio Thomas settled where Hugh Hinder now lives. About that time also came the aforementioned Charles Lison. One can imagine the activity in the tiny settlement where all the available supplies had to be hauled by team, overland 100 miles from Milwaukee. The "store" was in the log cabin where the hotel was later to rise, the cabin to which Mr. Briggs brought his family in 1851. Besides his wife, Robey Ormsbee Briggs, there were his four children, Lydia, aged 24, who had been married to Darwin F. Atwood in 1848; Abby Ormsbee, aged 22, who was to become the wife of Dr. Mitchell and the mother of Robert E. Mitchell; James Alexander, -then a boy of 15 years, and little Emma Robey who was only 8. Mrs. Briggs disliked the confusion and the discomforts of life in the log cabin besides the new dam, where the settlers came for provisions as they were brought in from Milwaukee, and where, doubtless, every newcomer stopped for information, a hot meal, and even a bed. Accordingly a new home of logs was built for her on the high bank of Neenah Creek, below the dam. This was later replaced by a frame house where James A. Briggs reared his family of four children: Abby, Ellis, William and Robey, and where William Heberlein now lives.

With the return of A. E. Briggs to the tiny village, it appears that the building activities increased to an almost feverish pitch. The foundations for the "flouring mill" at the north end of the flume were commenced, and the building was finally completed in 1853 after Hiram and Lysander Chapman had arrived from New York State and taken an interest in the mill with Messrs. Briggs and Chamberlain. A. E. Briggs also constructed a brick kiln below the sawmill, in 1851. Chimney brick sold at \$6.00 per thousand, well brick at \$5.00, and a cheaper grade at \$4.00 per thousand.



In the meantime, history which had a bearing upon the destiny of little Briggsville, was in the making on the outskirts of the vicinity. Off to the northwest, towards Big Springs, James Slowey came with his widowed mother and family from Ireland, in 1850. And Margaret McDonald arrived with her family, the Michael McDonalds, to settle in the southern part of Adams County. Their trading post was Briggsville, and there both families attended mass wherever it was held, in pioneer homes, prior to the building of St. Mary's Church in 1864. Margaret McDonald Slowey and James Slowey had 11 children. They lived, all but one year, on what was known as the George Walsh farm, from their marriage in 1870 until Mrs. Slowey's death in 1908. Three of the eleven children of this pioneer couple are still residing at Briggsville: Phillip Slowey, Susan (Mrs. Edw. Dinegan), and Mrs. Margaret O'Brien.

To the westward of Briggsville, the father of Dwight D. Eighna had built a small mill soon after his arrival in 1849, where a creek ran through what later generations called Cummings Cove. This was abandoned because the power supplied was found insufficient for running the mill. In this vicinity in the winter of 1851, Lester C. Jacobs pioneered to what is now known as the Claude Ellis farm. His family followed in the spring of 1852. Mr. Jacobs was killed in the Civil War and his widow later married Oliver Fellows who built the original house where the Post Office now stands. One of his daughters, Harriet, married Thomas Lewis Barlow who purchased the Aaron Town farm in 1881, and was one of Briggsville's ablest builders. The son of this marriage, Charles Barlow, has been the village Postmaster from 1917 until 1950.

Another of the earliest settlers whose descendants live in the immediate vicinity of Briggsville, was Ebenezer A. Corning a relative of Daniel Webster. He made the last lap of his journey from New Hampshire with an ox team in 1850. His claim, recorded in 1851 lay in the Town of Lewiston, Columbia County, a short distance from the Lewiston Cheese Factory of more recent years. Mr. Corning was surveyor for the entire area, and farmer during the summer months and a school-

teacher during the winter. He taught school for many years in his own district, and even the Gay School in the winter of '67 - '68.

In the fall of 1851 Edw. B. Craig, farmer and stock-dealer, came into the new settlement and purchased the property of Silas Walsworth on the Old Pinery Road at the Big Slough. The following year, in 1853, he built his "hotel", known as Menomonee House; which did a large business in the early history of Columbia County. This interesting building and farm, after being successively in the charge of L. V. Rich, Wm. Robinson, Wm. Treadwell, and Jonathan and Asa Douglass, became the property of Benjamin Anacker whose son, Ernest, is still its owner. It is probable that this was one of the first buildings built of the bricks manufactured at the yard in Briggsville.

Three or four miles northeast of Briggsville lies a small community known as Douglas Center. There, in 1849, Joseph Henry Loomer and his wife, Betsy Cady Loomer, settled on the land directly north of what is now known as the Landgraf Farm. Mr. Loomer came from Nova Scotia and Betsy Cady from Erie County, New York. The Landgraf farm was settled in 1853 and has been owned by the same family ever since. A descendant of those earliest Loomers and Landgrafs is Mrs. Myra Landgraf Schwemerlein who has lived in Briggsville for many years.

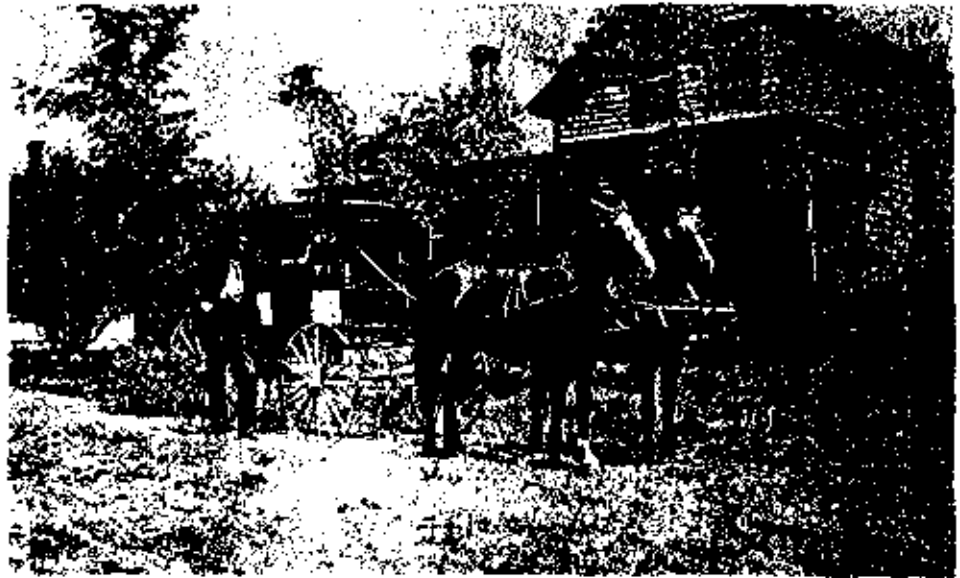
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Life was not without excitement and even danger in the Briggsville area of those early times. Amplus Chamberlain, in his History of Columbia County, tells us that "In 1849 a claim society was organized, composed of settlers in the towns of Newport, and Lewiston, Columbia County, and the counties of Adams and Marquette. The object of the society to protect the first settlers in their claims. The land, not then being in market, was not subject to entry, but many men locating and improving lands selected, with the intention of securing their claim as soon as thrown in the market. It was feared that there would be those who, observing improvements made, would hasten to file claims before the original settler could do so, thus defrauding them out of their just rights. A number of cases of disputed claims came before the society, which they attempted to settle in their own way.

"In the spring of 1852, James Litchfield located upon the northwest quarter of Section 1, Township 13, Range 7, erected a small frame dwelling and cleared about 5 acres of land. He received notice from the society to vacate, as another party had a prior claim. Consulting with neighbors, he was satisfied that



Flouring and Carding Mills of J. A. Briggs—1853



Mark Peterson, Postmaster—1899



Creamery and Kimball Bros. Store—1895

Mr. Norris, the other claimant, had selected another quarter and was, therefore, entitled to no more. For this reason he refused to go. One Saturday, in the month of May, 1852, near midnight, some 10 or 12 masked men came here and, calling up Mr. and Mrs. Litchfield, ordered them out of the house, set it on fire, burning it to the ground. The unfortunate couple went to the house of John Brickwell where they remained for a few days, and from there to Mr. Briggs', where they stayed until a new house could be built for them by the sympathizing neighbors.

"Five of the masked men were recognized by Mr. and Mrs. Litchfield, warrants were sworn out, and they were arrested and bound over for trial in the Circuit Court, for arson.

"The first term, after indictment, the defendents got a continuance of the case, and at the time for the second term, Mrs. Litchfield was too ill to attend the trial. The matter was compromised, and the case stricken from the docket."

It is recorded that Jonathan Butterfield died very suddenly while riding to Portage with two strangers, in 1852. He was showing them the route of the New Pinery Road, recently opened -- the road which crosses the Big Slough Bridge at the Anacker Farm. He was buried near his Little Lake, in the cemetery at Sunset Hill (where Mark Peterson now lives). This cemetery was moved, a few years later, to its present location.

South of Douglas Center lay the William Post farm, and to this property there arrived, on Christmas Eve 1854, Joseph Gay and his family. This farm has been continuously occupied by the Gays ever since. One of Joseph Gay's daughters, Ellen, became the wife of James A. Briggs.

In this same year Mr. Lefavor Waters arrived in Briggsville. His first store was in the log cabin built for Aaron Town. Later he and Mr. Briggs built a store on the site of Dr. Boots' old home, and this store and dwelling was later sold to Charles Waldo. Meanwhile, Mr. Town had built his frame dwelling to the north, on the site where Will Kimball was to build, years later, when the Town house was moved to the next lot north. (John Gray and his family occupy it today.) The property occupied by Mr. Town for his residence extended from the new Protestant Cemetery south to the crossroad in the Village, and west to the road which is now Briggsville's main street. There were no other dwellings on this large lot, at that time, and it was entirely surrounded by a stake-and-rider fence.

Hiram and Lysander Chapman, that year of 1854, built the dwelling which has been known as the "Dean House" since its purchase by that family in 1873. This property upon which the Chapmans built was a part of the original homestead which was issued by Government Patent to Aaron Town.

In 1854 came William Murphy to the new settlement, where he soon built a flourishing trade in his store which is today Clark's Tavern. That same year William Morrill arrived from Randolph, Vermont, with his two sons, John and Azro, and two foster daughters, Harriet and Rosetta Dyer. He purchased the land now known as the Russell Davison farm, from Robert Thompson. The son, John Morrill, later married Harriet Dyer and lived in Briggsville for many years in the house last owned by Mrs. James Gay. Son Azro Morrill was married, in 1866, to Melvina Worden whose father, Holly Grant Worden, had made claim in 1849 to the land known today as the John West farm. There the original log house, although for many years disguised with siding, is still in use as the residence. A granddaughter of Holly Grant Worden, Eloise Tanner, married George Williard in 1890. Their three sons and their children, living in and near Briggsville, and Miss Nettie Morrill of Portage, are the only living descendants of the Morrills and the Wordens. The Tanner farm lay between the Thomas Moses claim (later the Lucius D. Dean farm), and the Menomonee House on the Big Slough.

Peter A. Peterson, a young Norwegian, came to the town of Lewiston in 1854 and soon thereafter moved to Briggsville where he built a wagon shop and engaged in his trade of carpenter. He married, in 1863, Anna Sophia Dahl, and of his 5 children, three are still living: Clark D., Mrs. Ella Dean, and Miss Inez Peterson.

The spring of the year 1855 saw the arrival in the Briggsville area of James Kimball and his wife, Almina Atwood Kimball, from Shoreham, Vermont. Their first home was the farm now owned by the House family, south of Robert Corning's on old Highway 23. There, in the fall of the same year, William Kimball was born. A year later the Kimballs moved to a farm farther south and west, in the Town of

Lewiston, later known as the Joe Corning farm. In 1884 they moved to Briggsville where they started a store in what is now the Odd Fellows Hall, using the upstairs as their dwelling.

To the same farm, first occupied by the Kimballs, came Harvey Briggs, about the year 1857. There, in 1858, Ella Briggs was born, who was to become the wife of James Story Gay. Another daughter, Chloce, born in 1851 at Packwaukee, married Frederick Davis who later owned the Davis farm, just south of the House place. This picturesque old house was built by Joshua Corning, a cousin of Ebenezer Corning, who had a "pigeon bed" on the place, where he killed and dressed passenger pigeons for market. The pigeons were attracted to the place by means of stool-pigeons, and Mr. Corning hired people to pick them. This trade carried on extensively in America soon led to the extermination of the passenger pigeon and it is interesting to note that for many years there has been a reward of \$10,000.00 offered to anyone who might procure a pair of these birds.

Joshua Corning also built the house in Briggsville where Darwin and Lydia Briggs Atwood lived, now occupied by Clem Champony, the grandson of another early settler. Darwin Atwood was a half brother of Mrs. James Kimball and a cousin of Joshua Atwood who came with Rosina, his wife, and Alma, his daughter, from Shoreham, Vermont in 1857, to settle at "Bonnie Oaks", east across the Big Marsh from Briggsville. Here they found a log cabin on a sandy knoll under the gnarled oaks for which young Alma named the place. They found also relics of an earlier civilization: two large effigy mounds, an eagle with outspread wings, and, about two rods to the north, a bear mound. The site, on the banks of the Neenah Creek, had long been a camping ground for Winnebago Indians. In fact, a family was encamped there when the Atwoods arrived. Their small daughter, Martha (Good Village) Decorah was to become the wife of Henry Dick---an Indian name well known to Briggsville residents for many years until his death, in 1932, at the age of 79.

Henry Dick came from Wittenberg, Wisconsin, from a full-blooded Winnebago

family. He settled in Adams County upon his marriage to Martha but in the early 1900's he traded a tract of land in that county for a piece of land owned by Eugene Gray in Marquette County. There he spent his remaining years.

A grandson of Henry Dick, Nathan Decorah, wrote in 1949 as follows:

"Louis Decorah and his paternal forebears were of French descent. History tells of the French general that commanded the garrison at Quebec in the early days of that wonderful city. History relates the marriage of this French army officer to the chief's daughter of the Winnebago Tribe.--one son and two daughters were born of this marriage."

The chief's daughter, mentioned above, was Glory-of-the-Morning, and the French general was called De Kaury, from whence the name Decorah.

The Decorahs had been chiefs of the Winnebago tribe for many years when, in 1837, the Indians were invited to sell their remaining lands east of the Mississippi to the Government. Mr. Chamberlain in his History of Columbia County writes:

"One-eyed DeKaury, Little De Kaury, Winneshiek, Maukon De Kaury and six other chiefs complied with the request. They reserved the privilege of occupying their lands until 1840, and received their annuity at Portage until that time."

The whites, nevertheless, made claims on the ceded lands.

Many of the pioneers were kind and friendly towards their Indian neighbors and the latter frequently showed their appreciation by giving them Indian names and adopting them into their tribe, as well as by performing kindnesses of a more material nature.

Pa-zee-gah and Koo-nee-kah-gah were two of the Indian women well known to the early settlers, and Big Sam Decorah, John Canoe, Red Horn and Smoke Smoke were prominent men in the tribe. The women taught many a worried housewife how to use the native herbs as medicine, and it is reported that once when Alexander Briggs had a terrible nose-bleed, "Blue-Eyes" Decorah brought herbs and instructed Mrs. Briggs how to use them. The bleeding stopped almost immediately.

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Nathaniel Gray, his wife, Julia, and seven children, Wallace, Harmon, Ira, Eugene, Dudley, Helen and Anna, came from the town of Corinth, New York in February,

1857, and located on the farm now owned by Ira Brancel. Later they moved to the Perry Monger homestead where Donald Gray now lives. Mr. Gray was a shoemaker by trade and made all the boots and shoes for his family. He was keenly interested in farming and at one time owned several hundred acres. There are many descendants of Nathaniel and Julia Gray living in Briggsville and its environs.

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The first Catholic cemetery was located at the crossroads of what today are the Brancel, Joe Gay and Burmeister farms. This plot was donated by a Mr. McIntyre. The cemetery was moved to its present location about 1856 with the purchase of the land from the original Aaron Town homestead. The transaction is described as follows in a letter, dated April 14, 1856, to the Editors of the Badger State:

Dear Sirs: On Wednesday of last week I visited a settlement of Irish Catholics in the neighborhood of Briggs' Mill, some ten miles distant from this city. They all expressed a wish to have a church for Divine service erected in their vicinity.

To have their wishes realized, I waited on Mr. Briggs, the proprietor of the promising village which bears his name; and with true genuine liberality he donated to the congregation two large lots, beautifully located for the purpose required, together with two acres for a burial ground, the last at a nominal charge.

The subscription list was opened on the spot and in a few minutes this zealous people in their laudable pride each to have the highest figure annexed to his name, gave ample assurance that the church will be completed during the forthcoming summer.

I think I'm only discharging a debt of gratitude to Mr. Briggs to make known through the medium of your journal this very liberal donation, as well as to return my individual thanks not only for the magnificent gift but also for the bland and courteous manner in which it was bestowed.

I left Mr. Briggs' nephew, a young lawyer of much promise, engaged in drawing of the deed. The conduct of both the Uncle and Nephew contrasts pleasantly with the bigoted spirit which talismanic-like influences the thought, words and deeds of the "Knights of the dark lantern" we meet with elsewhere.

For information which may be useful to certain classes of your readers, let me add, Messrs. Editors, that I believe Briggsville, from its locality, the quality of the soil of the surrounding district, its waterpower, etc. etc. is an eligible place for the enterprising mechanic, the sturdy storekeeper or the energetic husbandman.



Begging a corner for the above in your issue of this week to pay "Honor  
to whom honor is due,"

*See  
insert  
to  
page*

I am dear Sirs,

Yours obliged,

James David Roche

(City Clerk's Office, Portage, April 12, 1856.)

Prior to the completion of the church in 1864, mass was offered in the homes of the pioneers, notably in the large log house of Patrick Clark, one of the very early settlers on the North shore of Lake Mason. Many pioneers contributed to the building of the church. One parishioner John Gaffney, a Union soldier in the Civil War, sent his contribution from the battlefield of Chickamauga.

Father Edward Welsh was the first resident pastor who came in 1881 but died soon thereafter. He was succeeded by Father John Schwartzmeyer under whose supervision the rectory was enlarged and the church enlarged and rebuilt.

The cornerstone was laid early in 1885 and in July, 1885, the church was completed.

When the church and pastor's residence were burned in 1924 the new church and rectory were built the following year and dedicated by Archbishop Sebastian S. Messmer of Milwaukee, who for 40 years came to Briggsville every three years to administer Confirmation.

Pilot Knob and Friendship were former missions of St. Mary's of Briggsville.

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Marquette County is one of the oldest of the political units formed by the subdivision of Brown County of pre-territorial days. It was set aside by an act of the Legislature Dec. 7, 1836. The village of Briggsville was platted October 23, 1854, by Harvey Briggs. Amplus Chamberlain was the first Town Superintendent, and Henry Parrott was the first Town Clerk who transcribed the records for Douglas and Moundville. The Town of Douglas was formed in 1858, so named for Stevan A. Douglas of the Lincoln-Douglas debates. Long before this time, however, the first election in the community was held at the Lewis farm, the first claim recorded in Lewiston near the present Town Hall, and included all the people from Briggsville and the surrounding territory.

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With the growth of the Village came the organization of the school

district which in those days included Briggsville and Moundville. On December 11, 1852, the first meeting of the district was held in the village store. It was voted to build a log school, to raise \$25.00 to finish the building, and that the schoolhouse be situated on the hill back of the A.E. Briggs home. There the children when they stole a look out of the windows would often see Indians paddling down the creek. When school opened for three months in 1853, Abby O. Briggs was the teacher. There were 31 pupils ranging in age from four to twenty. Horatio S. Thomas was chosen superintendent and G. H. Chamberlain clerk pro-tem. Perry Monger was made director and G. H. Chamberlain clerk for the ensuing year.

This early community was composed of English, Irish, and German settlers who did not always agree. In 1858 the English and the Irish, from both Briggsville and Moundville, fell into disagreement about the school district, so it was brought to a vote. The English persuaded the Germans to vote with them to separate Moundville and Briggsville and so won the point!

A new school was built on the site of the present Odd Fellows Hall in 1859 and was later incorporated into that building. Later still in 1868 a third school was built on the lot back of the present Post Office. This building was moved to a spot north of the Catholic Church; and in 1924 the present Village School was erected. The Moundville school which was organized as the result of the "battle" is known as District #11, or the Gay School.

Development of the village continued during these early years with the erection of a small frame building where the hotel parking lot is now located. Here John Hays conducted a shoe shop. Barney Brogan built and operated a blacksmith shop where the restaurant and meat market now stand. In 1858 a Sugar Mill was erected on the Neenah Creek, below the dam. Sorghum syrup sold at the low price of 18 cents per gallon. Henry Dyer built a Carding Mill across the road from the Sugar Mill. The latter was blown down the Creek by the cyclone of July 4, 1873.

Henry Dyer's son, "Hank" Dyer, bought the hotel from Chas. Mason. At this time the building was also used as the town's meeting hall. Thomas Ryan and Michael Costello purchased it from Dyer and they, in turn, sold it to "Oney" Connors. This old building, which closely resembled a New England inn, burned to the ground on July 7, 1912, and was replaced thereafter by the present building known as the Pheasant Inn.

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Lucius Danforth Dean and his family came to Briggsville in 1858 and settled on the Thomas Moses farm one mile south of the village. This farm remained in the Dean family until November, 1949. The family consisted of Mr. Dean and his wife, Lucina Goodnow Dean and their 6 children: Catherine, Susanna, Volney, Alverton, Herbert and Alice.

Alverton O. Dean, known as "Vert", was for many years a leader in musical interests of the community. It was a family heritage to which two of his nieces, as well as two of his grand-nieces, succeeded. He dealt in musical instruments (pianos and organs), until the time of his death in 1917.

Volney married Mary Ann Macfarland and to this marriage were born Charles Herbert (Bert), Gertrude Dean Forbes, Susan Dean Cummings, John Parker Dean, Daisy Dean Williams and Helen Dean Eneyeart.

In 1873 Lucius Dean and his family moved to Briggsville and settled in the home which is still occupied by Daisy Williams and Gertrude Forbes. This beautiful old house on the Lake shore, beneath a giant elm, built by Hiram and Lysander Chapman in 1854, is one of the 3 oldest houses in the village. Dr. Dean and his son, Herbert, operated a harness and leather goods business in a small store on the site of the present Briggsville garage. This building was later moved to the banks of the Big Slough, on the Tom Davison farm, and is still in use.

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It would appear that little Briggsville in its earliest years could boast

more post-office locations than many another village of its size. In 1854 William Murphy was appointed first postmaster, with the office located in his store. The mail was brought by stagecoach from Portage City. In 1860 Charles Waldo was appointed postmaster, with the office in his store, next door to Murphy's. In 1884 it was again moved to the old Murphy store, and at that time mail was brought by a stage line through Portage City, Briggsville, Big Springs, Davis Corners, Little Lake, Grand Marsh, Spring Bluff and Friendship.

In 1888 Peter A. Peterson received the appointment with the office site unchanged. On January 1st., 1893, the first money-order was issued. In 1894, J. F. Murphy was appointed postmaster. His office was in what is now the Odd Fellows Hall (then the James Kimballs' store.) In 1898 Peter A. Peterson was again appointed to the office, followed by his son, Mark D. Peterson in 1899, and the site remained the same.

In 1904 Inez L. Peterson was appointed postmistress and the office was moved to the site of the present Briggsville garage. The following year Eliza Kimball Phelps was appointed postmistress and the office was located in the new Kimball Store. Mail was supplied by the present rural route out of Portage, with M. D. Peterson as carrier. In 1916 Frank D. Kimball was appointed acting postmaster and the following year Charles Barlow took over the duties, with the office moved to his home. This centennial year marks his 33rd in office and his retirement. It may well be that the little postoffice is "on the move" again!

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In 1861 and '62 three families became close neighbors east of the Neenah Creek in the Gay School district. George and Jane Smith came from Scotland and built a hospitable log cabin where Fred Mills now has his farm. Next door, to the south, came Joseph Grandy and his family to settle on the farm now owned by John and Annie Phillips, and John Hindes moved to the farm now occupied by James O'Keefe. Mr. Hindes had returned from the Civil War to Pewaukee, Wis. to find that five of



Waldo's Store and Flouring Mill --1858



Mason Hotel and Murphy Store--1854



School Class See Next Page

KEY TO SCHOOL PICTURE

First Row - left to right:

Laura Murphy, Helen Dean, Lyda Alexander, Herman Hanson, Ole Hanson,  
Glen Dyer, Charlie Barlow.

Second Row - left to right:

Dode Cummings, Ella Dean, Carrie Stevens, Bertha Stevens,  
Daisy Williams, Belle Brooks, Tod Gray, John Dean, Tylie Champeny,  
Johnie Murphy, George Orton, Jake Gray.

Third Row - left to right:

Laura Paige, Roby Briggs, Cert Forbes, Minnie Brancel,  
Abbie Briggs - teacher, Estelle Cumming, Mark Peterson, Will Briggs,  
Leon Gray, Willy Murphy, Harze Gray.

his seven young daughters had died during his absence, of the dreaded diphtheria. He and Mrs. Hinder came to Briggsville, then, in 1862, with Nancy, who was to marry Thomas West and whose children, John Richard and Anna are living in the Briggsville area today, and Alice. Here Martin Hinder was born the following year, and thereafter Parson and John.

One of the Grandy girls, Emma, married George Smith's son, and Gertrude Grandy was later to marry Robert Heberlein whose father, Jacob, came in 1868 to the farm across the road from Joseph Gay's. There were six children in this family when it arrived from Washington County. Minnie was later married to William Kimball, and Frederick became the husband of Sarah Peterson, eldest daughter of the pioneer, Peter A. Peterson. William Heberlein, born in the Town of Douglas a year after the family's arrival, married Gertrude Phillips, a granddaughter of Dwight D. Eighme's sister, Eunice. Mr. Heberlein is the owner of the A. E. Briggs homestead today. His only surviving sister, Kathryn, (Mrs. Charles Champeny) now aged 89, lives at Oxford, Kansas.

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It is only in recent years that this part of the country has become America's Dairyland". Wisconsin, in those early days, was noted for its wheat but the crops were repeatedly ravaged by cinch-bugs and wheatraising ceased to be profitable. The next important crop is described by Amplus Chamberlain as follows:

The cultivation of hops for the general market commenced in this vicinity in 1859. The profits made by those engaged in the culture of hops being large, one after another of the farmers engaged in it until, in 1867, the whole vicinity was excited in a wonderful manner and a very large area of land was devoted to this purpose.

When the season came for picking and drying, considerable difficulty was experienced in securing a sufficient number of pickers, and this demand created a new industry. Leroy Gates conceived the idea of going to many of the cities and villages throughout the state, securing the services of as many girls as possible, and hiring them to the farmers at a certain amount per head. It required 15,000 pickers to gather the crop this year, 10,000 of whom were brought from abroad.

The editor of the Milwaukee Sentinel was on one of the trains bringing a delegation of pickers to this place, and thus expresses his thoughts:

"Coming from Milwaukee, a few days ago, while comfortably enjoying a cigar in the smoking room, the train stopped at a little station----there they were, and in they came----a thousand we thought, but the recruiting officer said there were but 600! A thousand were coming on the next train.

"The Major General of this division of the army of hop-pickers was Leroy Gates, who made the unsuspecting public believe that he is a Dells pilot. Pilot he is, but not of logs or lumber--he pilots the wearers of calico and crinoline to the fields where the hops do grow. It broadens human feelings to know there are so many lively girls in the world, and beer will be none the worse for a view of the hands which pick the berries that give it its bitter-sweet."

The total yield for the year, shipped from one station, was 5,400,000 pounds, and sold from 50 cents to 65 cents per pound, yielding over \$2,700,000; \$270,000 of which was paid as wages to the girls.

The farmers were delighted with their experience and each believed he had found the way to sure wealth. Therefore, in 1868, the number of hop-yards increased and older ones were enlarged. When the season for picking drew near, the question arose as to where to find pickers. Advertisements were placed throughout the state and agencies established in the villages. Contracts were made for the season with all who would go, their fare, board and highest wages being guaranteed. Trains were chartered and for several days every freight and passenger train was crowded with fair women on their way to the hop fields. Those from each vicinity were classified as A, B, C, etc. and were instructed to go with the party who should call for their class. Farmers who had contracted for a certain number of pickers were told they should receive their number from a specified class.

Unprincipled men took advantage of the circumstances, and, on arrival of the trains, would call out, "Class A, take this wagon!", "This way, all belonging to Class B", thus deceiving the ladies and swindling the contractors out of their fees and the farmers out of their pickers.

The heaviest load contained about 1,200. It arrived in the night, but over 300 teams were ready to take the pickers to the hop-yards. The crop this year amounted to 30,000 bales, but the price had dropped to 10 cents a pound. \$600,000 was realized, but half went to the pickers.

In 1869 the hop-yards were few and far between, though there are a few who never abandoned the business.

Many men, who later became prominent, founded their fortunes in the hop-yards. Large, ornate houses were built, and in addition to housing the hop-pickers, were the scene of many dances, which often lasted until time to go to the fields.

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In 1865 John Brenzel and his family arrived in the vicinity. The name was later changed to Brancel, and his sons, Frederick, William and John all played prominent parts in the development of the Briggsville region.



Jay P. Colburn, eldest son of the pioneer, Alonzo W. Colburn who came to Wisconsin in 1845 and settled in Newport, came to Lewiston in 1866. He was a Cooper by trade and a Civil War veteran. He married Lucy E. Jacobs, another daughter of the pioneer Lester G. Jacobs. Their oldest son, Frank L. a pioneer of the 50's, is living in Briggsville in the house that was built by the widow of George West, grandfather of the generation still living in Briggsville.

Evan Magnus Hanson came from Ness Rumarika, Norway, in 1867 at the age of 22. He settled in Briggsville where he lived until his death in 1924, working untiringly at his trades of carpentry and shoe-making. In 1879 he married Hilda Paulson, who was born near Oslo, Norway in 1859 and came to the Town of Lewiston at the age of 8. Mrs. Hanson has been a resident of Briggsville for 71 years and makes her home with Mrs. Tyley G. Champeny, who is one of her eight living children.

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The first Protestant Church in Briggsville was a Universalist Society organized in 1873 by Joseph Franklin Bacon, a blacksmith by trade. Early in that year a church was built on the site of the present one, but was destroyed by the cyclone of July 4th, before its completion.

Lucius Danforth Dean was one of the founders, and it was largely through the untiring efforts of Lydia Briggs Atwood that the Methodist Episcopal Church Society purchased the property after the Universalist society had decided not to rebuild. This church was completed in 1879.

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In 1871 Frederick J. Burmeister moved to the Town of Douglas and purchased the Terry Cromlet farm from the original owner of the land. The following year he divided his farm with Conrad Schwemerlein who had come to the area in 1870. The holdings were finally re-united as a result of his marriage to Mr. Schwemerlein's daughter. Their son, Andrew, lives on the old farm.

In March of 1877 Joseph Champeny, born in England Oct. 2, 1838, arrived in

Briggsville to purchase a half interest in the flouring mill of James A. Briggs. In 1880 he bought the remaining interest in the mill and thereafter, until its sale in 1942, it was operated by the Champeny family, father and sons. A few years later Charles Champeny, his son, built a sawmill a few rods south of the present mill.

On December 2, 1892, the dam, which had been reconstructed the year before, went out because of heavy frost which cracked the foundations. The catastrophe occurred in the middle of the night and before it was discovered had washed out the dam, the walls beneath the mill, and 80 feet on the west side of the flume, taking with it a part of the Champeny saw-mill and the millshed.

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History deals solely in "facts 'n' figgers" and there is little room between its covers for the folk-lore and humor which are the essence of the living characters who walk across its pages. Nevertheless, it would be unfair to leave Briggsville to the ravages of modern vehicles and "contraptions" without recalling that in 1860 the Briggsville Library Association was formed, with a membership of 42 persons---and 9 books! These consisted of the Life of Horace Greeley, Europa, Lives of the Signers of the Declaration of Independence, Our Happy Home, Green Mountain Girls, Battlefields of the Revolution, Livingstone's Explorations, Dr. Valeritine's Lectures, and Mrs. Sigourney's Poems.

There were amusing characters who furnished high comedy for the settlers but who should remain anonymous to all but those who knew them. Among them was the lady who, never content with one apron in a day, wore 3, 4 or even 5, one above the other. And there was the young man who asked the object of his devotion to change their date from Thursday to Friday, explaining that he shaved on Fridays and would therefore be more presentable on that day! There was also the woman who, coming across the Big Marsh "with 100 pounds of roots and 'Bub' on her back", sank into the mire "clean up to her neck and slick down to her heels"!

There was a "preacher" who, in those early days, might have been a charter

member of the Liars' Club, so "tall" were his tales. He had "a rich uncle who had 500 cats and every day his aunt fed 'em a pail of milk." (One wonders how far that pail of milk would have gone, even in 1850!) He it was who "saw a snake swallow 11 pigeons." He must have been a gay blade, for a preacher, because he related that once he danced so hard all night that when he took off his boots in the morning "they were full of blood":

And there was the tiny girl who, listening wide-eyed to a Scottish grandma's description of the "vessel" in which she made her harrowing voyage to America, wondered for years, without daring to ask, how anyone could be transported across the briney deep in anything so strange!

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The rest of Briggsville's history belongs to a more modern era and was reflected clearly in the diaries which Charlotte Waldo kept so faithfully for many years. From them, and others, it is known that in

- 1876: The Odd Fellows organized with 5 charter members; Wm. Morgan, O. Downing, W. W. Page, Hugh Ennis and O.C. Pomeroy.
- 1881: Cornelius Peterson, carpenter, with his family, arrived from Norway to settle in Briggsville.
- 1883: Lars Hanson and family arrived from Norway.
- 1884: Oct. 27th--G.A.R. organized. (W. J. Kershaw Post, #188, with 19 comrades. First commander, Robert Hume. First meetings in Dyer's hall.)  
Store building around old schoolhouse completed for Kimballs.
- 1886: G.A.R. Hall built by Peter Peterson and Thos. Barlow, the supervisors raising the money by Pork and Bean dances.
- 1890: Fred Heberlein on the stagecoach to Portage, returning to school.
- 1891: May 12--The Briggsville Creamery opened.
- 1892: March 2--Melvin Griffin came to live at Waldos'.  
December 2--The Briggsville Dam went out.