

The following history was given to me on March 2, 2009 by Chairman David J. Hughes at our monthly town board meeting. It had been given to him by Harold Streekstra who found it in his father's possessions. His father, George Streekstra was custodian of the Town Hall for many years.

When I read this history by William T. Whirry I felt it should be made available to more people. The copy was too poor to be scanned so I retyped it over the last several days. I also talked to Jay Williams from Cambria and he sent me information about Mr. Whirry from a Columbia County History and you will find it at the end of the history section. Since Section numbers are mentioned often, I am including a map of the town to help identify the location.

Rod Kok-Clerk  
Town of Randolph



THE

TOWN OF RANDOLPH

COLUMBIA COUNTY, WISCONSIN

ITS SETTLEMENT, FIRST SETTLERS, INCIDENTS  
ETC., INCLUDING ITS TRANSACTIONS  
DURING THE

WAR OF THE GREAT REBELLION

BY WILLIAM T. WHIRRY  
RANDOLPH, 1873

Office of  
“The Randolph Enterprise”  
1873

PREFACE

In the summer of 1871 the editors of the Wisconsin State Register, Published at Portage, invited the undersigned to write a sketch of the early history of the Town of Randolph for publication in their paper. Their request was complied with, and it was accordingly published in said paper August 5, 1871, and at the annual town meeting of the Town of Randolph, April, 1872, it was voted said sketch be continued and recorded in the town records. And, again, at the annual town meeting of said town, in April, 1873, it was "voted that five hundred copies of the town's history be printed in pamphlet form;" hence my appearance in the role of a historian. Although said sketch has been thoroughly revised, still it is possible that it may contain a few unimportant errors, but so much pains have been taken by correspondence, examination of records, etc., and nearly two years having elapsed since the greatest portion of it was first given to the public, and from the well known fact of my having been an eye witness of all but the very earliest, it is put forth with great confidence, and with the satisfaction that the early history of the town is saved from oblivion. And to those who have so kindly responded to my letters of inquiry, I offer my sincere thanks.

Randolph, 1873

W. T/. Whirry

## THE TOWN OF RANDOLPH

From a retrospective point of view, it seems but yesterday that the stillness of centuries on prairies and openings was broken by the advent of the pioneer; but a present view dispels that illusion, and discloses the fact that the writer is the oldest settler of the English speaking population of the town, and very forcibly reminds us that our old settlers are rapidly passing away – some to their last, long homes, and some to the new homes in the West, and with them much that would be interesting and instructive to posterity; and it is also to be regretted that the history of the town was not written years ago, when the actors were all here and able to refresh each other's memories with the trials and incidents inseparably connected with a pioneer life, and which will never be heard of more; yet it is well to save from oblivion what we can while we can; a few years hence would be too late. A quarter of a century makes great changes in a new country, and those who reside here now, know but little of the trials and privations connected with the early settlement, but something might be imagined from the fact that in those times there were no roads, no stores, no postoffices, no mills, no schools – nothing but a vast extent of beautiful, boundless country, just as nature had fashioned it, and the first settler might have exclaimed, "I am monarch of all I survey." The nearest postoffice was at Watertown, and there they went for groceries; to Watertown or Janesville to mill; to Columbus to vote, and to Fond du Lac to attend district conventions. Our Senate and Assembly districts, (then called council and representative), even as late as 1846, consisted of what was then the Counties of Manitowoc, Sheboygan, Brown, Marquette, Fond du Lac, Portage, Calumet, and Winnebago, nearly one-third of the State. When, again, imagine the difference in living, for in those days wheat flour was a very scarce article, because but few could raise any wheat until they had been here two seasons – one to break up the land and rot it, and another to raise the crop in; and if a family got out of flour there were no stores to go to, in order to buy more, and but seldom any money; nothing to do but borrow (unless, as was sometimes the case, that all hands were cut) until some lazy ox team arrived with all the grists of the neighborhood, after an absence of perhaps one week or more. Buckwheat and cornmeal was extensively used, the former sometimes ground in a coffee mill and screened through a cloth and made into pancakes, and when they had flour they frequently had nothing to mix with it but water, and no meat, potatoes, butter or milk to eat with it; and after it was baked it was as hard as a stone, but it had one redeeming quality – it would keep well – so that the getting up of a meal was a very simple operation after the bread was baked; the cook was not puzzled to know whether the meal would suit the taste of all or not; there were no side glances cast around the board to see what delicacies were put on to tempt the appetite; no one said "not any, I thank you." Hard tack was all they expected, and hard tack they got, and they were satisfied, and believed that man's natural wants were very few indeed. Again, all the schooling their children got was what they were taught at home by someone of the family or by any female they could find who could read, write and cipher, and could be spared a few hours a day to instruct them, which was a rare thing, as they all had too much work to do; for as soon as a settler had selected a piece of land, the first thing to be done was to provide shelter for his family, which with some of the earliest settlers was done by setting some crotches in the ground and covering the tops with poles and wild hay, and the sides in the same manner, making a primitive shelter impervious to wind or water; and in some instances, if the family was large, or they took in boarders, which was frequently the case in consequence of new comers arriving, they would make bedrooms in the same manner, but on a smaller scale, just high enough to creep into, and just long enough to lie full length, and with the ground covered with hay; and though they didn't exactly live in clover, it was the next thing to it – they lived in hay, and were comfortable and contented; and when night came they would creep into their nests and sleep soundly, while packs of cowardly, hungry wolves rent the air with their unearthly howlings, for the reader must bear in mind that for a number of years the large, grey wolves were quite numerous, and that the smaller prairie wolves were very plenty,

running in packs and howling all night long; and, also, as a matter of course, deer were very plenty, but when the deer left or were killed off, the wolves left also. But to return – a few who came late in the season, or were not able to build a house in time, and dreading the cold winter, would dig a hole in the ground and cover the top with boards or hay, and in such a burrow or dungeon they passed their first long and dreary Wisconsin winter, and patiently, yet anxiously, awaited the approach of spring. How they passed their time must be left to the imagination of the reader, for even a log house must be a palace in comparison with a hole in the ground. To one of those subterranean dwellings a surveyor came one day in the spring, according to appointment, to survey the land; but a heavy snow storm had fallen during the night, and he found the place with difficulty, and only by shouting and waiting until those below had heard him and dug their way out through the heavy snow drifts. But after these temporary shelters had been provided, the next thing to be done (and that was their highest ambition at that time) was to build a log house, which was done by cutting and hauling the logs, splitting out some oak shingles, or hauling some logs to a mill to be sawed into boards for floor, roof, etc., making it a bee, rolling up the logs and chinking and daubing the interstices with mud or clay. Every one helped cheerfully, and it is pleasant to think how proud every one was to have such rude hovels to live in; and many did live in them for years quite comfortable and happy. Some of our well-to-do farmers, who now live in stately mansions, recollect with pleasure the many happy years spent in that old log house, with parlor, kitchen, bedroom and storeroom, all in one, with its pole ladder to mount up to the chamber, which was another single room of low dimensions, perhaps divided off with quilts, blankets, etc., and it would puzzle many a good housewife now to stow away so many mortals as used to find accommodations in that old log house, for if travelers or emigrants came along they were welcomed in a spirit of hospitality seen nowhere at the present day. Taverns had been left behind, and it was considered a pleasure to divide what little they had with them and to those who thought of settling there to assist them in looking up land, nearly all seeming to try who could do the most to help the stranger in a strange land; and it cheered up many a one who was fatigued and discouraged with the trials they had undergone since leaving a comfortable and perhaps luxurious home elsewhere. These were times that tried men's souls, and bodies, too, for there was work to be done which money could not purchase, if they had it; but money was a scarce article, so that all hands had to work, and they did work with a will. Fences had to be made, which required some hard bounding to split the logs into rails, and before they could raise a crop the land had to be broken up, which required five yoke of oxen attached to a stout breaking plow; and then, after they had raised a crop of wheat it had to be hauled by teams all the way to Milwaukee, over road which would now be called impassable, and only to get from forty to fifty cents per bushel; and many times it has taken the proceeds of a load to pay the expenses, as will be recollected to the sorrow of many an old settler. The writer remembers an instance of a man who stopped on his place while going to Milwaukee with a load of wheat, and stopped again on his return, about two weeks after, stating that he had spent the proceeds of his load, and had been compelled to borrow five dollars in order to enable him to get home. After that, can any one wonder that the railroad swindlers and their agents succeeded so well in getting nearly all the farmers whose farms were unencumbered to mortgage them and be thus cheated.

It is not my purpose in this paper to go back so far as Father Marquette's time, but to go back as far as possible at this late day to anything relating to the township.

It is hard to tell who were the first white persons who ever set foot on its territory – some of the early missionaries might have traveled through there – but there is not much doubt that they were hunters, for a Frenchman, who died about three years ago near Lake Emily, over one hundred years of age, was wont to relate to the writer that these prairies and the adjacent lakes and marshes used to be a favorite resort of Canadian hunters, of which he was one, who used to come here annually, over fifty years ago, in quest of furs, etc., at which time deer and other game were very numerous; and in 1846,

in one of my rambles, I found on an island in the marsh, on section 1, the bleached skull and about one-half of the bones of a human being scattered about in different directions; they had probably lain there a number of years, as every particle of flesh and sinew was gone. I took the skull and jaw home, and kept them in the granary for a number of years, but they were finally stolen. All who saw the skull were of the opinion that it was the skull of a white man, but whether it was the remains of some early pioneer or hunter who had been killed by his companions in a quarrel, or had lost his way and perished, or whether brought there a captive by the Indians and killed by them and devoured by wolves, no one could tell; it has remained a mystery, and probably always will. It is possible that had he lived he would have figured in this sketch as the first settler in this town – if a white man – of which there is not much doubt, as it is well known that the Indians take great care of their dead. About this time these bones were found there was an Indian encampment near Lake Emily, and while there one of their squaws died, and they bandaged her body up with matting, etc., and kept it up a tree for about two months while they remained there, and when they left they took it with them, so it may not be amiss to call him the first settler; at any rate, he was settled, and so we will leave him. To most persons it may seem hard to be disposed of thus, but, as Byron says: “What matters where we fall to fill the maws of worms.” Yet we all wish to have our remains kept together and to be decently buried when we die; yet methinks that when Gabriel blows his trumpet at the last day, and the dead come forth from their graves, this poor fellow will have quite a job to get his bones together. (Note: Since the above was first published I have been informed of the following incident, which may be a solution of the mystery: In 1839, one of the soldiers of Fort Winnebago left on a drunken spree, and never returned. He was last seen by the mail carrier near Wyocena, in a nude state and insane. A search for him discovered only his clothes. He was never heard of more.)

Hamilton Stevens, who first located at Lake Emily, selected the first land in this town in 1843, on section 24, afterwards sold to A.B. Alden. Said Stevens had three daughters, named Emily, Maria and Sarah, and it is said the three lakes of those names were so named by him – the first in Dodge County, the second in Green Lake County, and the last in Randolph. He made a business principally of locating land, and would show new-comers government land, make a bargain, settle them on it, and then post off to the land office to enter it. A good joke is told of him, thus: A road had been recently laid out to Columbus, through the timber in what is now Courtland, and the trees had the usual mark of the letter H, signifying highway. The new-comers asked what H meant. Stevens replied, in his usual rough, bombastic way, “Hamilton Stevens, by G-d!” His companions were, of course astonished at his great wealth, as they imagined, for in their travels they had seen that H so frequently that they concluded that Stevens had bought out Uncle Sam, or at least that portion of the United States which was situated in Wisconsin.

The first bona fide settler in this town was George Knowles, who came from the City of New York, selected his land in the fall of 1843, on section 13, and entered it (as purchasing from the government was called) in February, 1844, and erected the first building in town at the same time, in the form of a board shanty, with white wood board brought from Fond du Lac; broke up some land in May, 1844, and resided on the same place until about 12 years ago; he resides now in Milwaukee, and is by occupation a wheat broker.

S.S. Torbert came from Illinois, March 16, 1844, in company with John Langdon and Benjamin Williams. Mr. Torbert raised the first log house on Section 16. B. Williams, being a single man, lived with him. They lived for a long time on succotash (green corn and beans) without anything else. He broke, as he claims, the first land; but that point is disputed by Mr. Knowles. His first crop of wheat was seventy bushels, from two acres, and two bushels in sowing, which had been dragged in with a wooden toothed drag. At that time there were only three log cabins at Fox Lake, and no building

between there and Fort Winnebago except Powderly's, near the latter place. Mr. Torbert now resides in Iowa.

John Langdon put up his log house very shortly after Torbert, on Section 29, but finished it first, making it the first log house in town. He brought in the first span of horses, and as Torbert and Williams came with him, and as they all brought cattle, they must all have the credit of bringing in the first oxen and cows; and they were called a very superior lot of cattle. He also brought some hogs, and came fully equipped to break up land, and did break up a good deal for others. He started Cambria – built the dam, and put up a saw mill, in company with Samuel Langdon, in 1845, and for several years it was called Langdon's Mill; but he became involved, and allowed a sharper, named Bell, to get hold of his property, who converted it to his own use, and changed the name of the place to Bellville—(it was afterward called Florence, then Cambria). John Langdon was thus financially ruined; and the loss of his hard earned property probably shortened his days. He removed to Bad Ax (now Vernon County), and died there in 1852.

Benjamin Williams located a piece of prairie on section 32, but did not build right off. He sold to Joseph Kerr, who came here in the fall of 1846; he then built on a piece of land adjoining Cambria; was sheriff for one term; now lives in the fruit region of Michigan.

Alvin H. Alden came from Connecticut in July, 1844, and put up a hay shanty, with wings for bed-rooms, on a splendid quarter section of openings on section 24, being the first land selected in town; built his log house in November, 1844; claims that he put in and harvested the first winter wheat; He was Clerk of the Board of Supervisors for several years; now resides in Portage.

John Converse came from Connecticut in October, 1844; boarded about six months with his son-in-law, Alvin B. Alden; put up his log house in the spring of 1845, on a clay knoll, on section 25; had a mill privilege, which nature had done a good deal for, except supplying it with water—if we except a few springs; but Uncle John, nevertheless, not to be balked by such a trifle built a dam and a small mill; and put in a bun of stones, belts, etc; Feed is still ground there, when we have a wet time. Uncle John kept the first house of entertainment for man and beast, and scores are now living who remember with pleasure the kind, liberal and motherly attentions of Mrs. Converse; though not kept in the style of the Fox House, yet everything that was substantial was in abundance, and all left satisfied—style was not expected in a log house. He was the first postmaster in town; kept the first postoffice, called Polk Prairie, a misnomer, as it was situated in the openings. The name was afterwards changed to East Randolph.

He was the founder of the Village of Randolph, in Dodge and Columbia Counties, for which he is entitled to the gratitude of the whole community, having labored almost single-handed against the combined efforts of Cambria, Fox Lake and the railroad company. The opposition he encountered would doubtless, have deterred almost any other person; but, after repeated refusals, in February, 1857, he obtained permission from the railroad company to put up a shanty on the prairie for the reception of grain, the company agreeing to stop the cars whenever he succeeded in getting a car-load, on being signaled, and providing the train was not detained over ten minutes. A poplar pole, with an old neck-scarf attached, was the signal used; now it is about the greatest wheat station on the line of the road. He built the Russell House, and when he removed there he took the postoffice and its name with him, which was the cause of the station being called Randolph. He was our first school superintendent, and now resides at Portage.

The first Welch people, in this section of our State, settled a few rods east of our town line, and the first in this town were the Rev. Thos. H. Roberts, David Roberts and John Evans. The two former settled on Section 4, and the latter on a poor eighty acres, on section 15, now used as a pasture by Wm. Harris; on the north end; and the first sermon delivered in the town was preached there, in the winter of 1844 and 1845, by the Rev. T. H. Roberts, at which time the Welsh church of Blaen-y-cae was organized. And also the Sabbath school, and religious services were held alternately at James Evan's, near Lake Emily, Catharine Roberts', Blaen-y-cae, and John Evans', on section 15; the first is now living at the same place, and aged about eighty-four years, the second died in May, 1871, aged eighty-three years, and the last has removed to Iowa.

The said Thos.H. Roberts, immediately after his arrival here, wrote letters to his friends in Wales, describing the country and its advantages, which were read in the mines there, and created quite a furor; the result was that the next spring witnessed the departure of a great many families to Wisconsin, who settled at Lake Emily, and what is now Courtland, Springvale and Randolph, all brought here by these letters. Mr. Roberts, like most of the Welsh preachers, is also a farmer, and has resided, until a few years ago, on his first location, and owns it now, but resides on the town line, in the town of Manchester, and is still a preacher and farmer, and very much respected by all. At one time, while he was in the woods splitting some rails, a noble looking stag came near where he was at work, stopping under a tree and appearing to lean against it; Mr. Roberts, rightly conjecturing that he had been wounded by some hunter, went up to him and caught him by the horns and secured him; he had been shot. David Roberts, mentioned above, settled near Lake Sarah, in 1844 and left in the spring of 1850 for California and died just as he came in sight of it. He located the first settlers in Springvale, etc. At one time, during his absence, some five or six Indians came to his house to beg some food, as was customary with them, and, in conversation among themselves, his wife declared that she heard them talking in the Welsh language; it created quite a sensation, in consequence of a tradition the Welsh people have that in the year 1170 (322 years previous to the discovery of America by Columbus), a party of Welsh people, under one of their chieftains, named Madoc, left Wales on a voyage for the West, and were never heard of more; but that, at some subsequent time, a traveler published a statement that, somewhere in his travels in the interior of America, he had met with a tribe of Indians who made use of a great many Welsh words, which had the same meaning they had in the Welsh language; for instance, it was one of their customs to build a sort of shanty with poles and boughs, projecting over a stream or body of water; that the name they gave it was a combination of the Welsh words for house and water. Consequently, a theory was made up that those early Welsh adventurers had really reached America, and from some cause unknown had been amalgamated with some Indian tribe, and had given them an addition to their language. Now, if Mrs. Roberts really heard those Indians speak some Welsh words, how could they have learned them otherwise?—unless some Indians had at some time visited Wales; and, also, may not the notorious Modoc Indians be their descendants?

The most of our first Welsh settlers had spent what little money they had by the time they had become settled here, some paid their last shilling for their land, a yoke of oxen, or a cow; one family paid out their last sovereign for an old, lame sow, but which proved a good speculation afterwards in the sale of pigs; but, with no money, or anything to exchange for groceries, they fared hard, indeed; and some recollect well how thankful they were to receive from an acquaintance, who was fortunate to own a cow when they had none, a small piece of butter or a little milk occasionally, and they would go a long distance to get it, and live a long time on its recollections; and many a family look back to the time their first cow calved as one of the most important epochs in their existence; for from that time they began to live, as they could exchange butter for what they needed, and with the good pasturage the

land afforded they could make about nine pounds of butter a week from a good cow, and felt comparatively independent.

For a long time after they came here, not one of them owned a wagon; but nothing prevented them from attending their religious meetings regularly, week-days as well as Sundays – and they went mostly afoot; and when the creeks were swollen in the spring, or over-flowed the low bridges, the women would take off their shoes and stockings, wade through, and redress on the other side, and go on to meeting. Would any American woman do that? Some went to meeting with a yoke of oxen and a low, log sled, similar to a stone-boat, winter and summer, and some used, for several years, low truck wagons, with the wheels cut from the ends of a large log, the squeaking of which could be heard for a mile when they went to and fro to meeting. Now, some of those very individuals drive as handsome a turn-out as any one.

Out Welsh people started the poultry business under rather discouraging circumstances. A friend of John Roberts' (Pontnewydd) had brought with him a pair of chickens to commence with, but they proved to be both roosters, and, as there were no hens to be found anywhere, the prospect for fresh eggs or chicken pie was poor, indeed; but a trade was struck up by which John Roberts was to have one if he would help to procure a hen; so they posted off together to Columbus, and after a good deal of travel, and more persuasion, and representing the very bad fix they were in, they procured two hens.

The following incident will give some idea of the loneliness of some of our early settlers (the neighbors being few and far between), The family of the above named John Roberts had resided here nearly one year before they saw a single individual, excepting their own people, when, one day, one of the boys came running in, shouting at the top of his voice, "Mother! Mother! There's a man coming!" and they were almost as much astonished as Robinson Crusoe was when he discovered the foot-prints in the sand.

Job W. Perry, though not one of the earliest settlers in this town, yet located his land in 1844, and deserves notice here. He lived a short time a few miles beyond the limits, built a large, good log-house on section 12, in the spring of 1845; came originally from New York, then Ohio, then Walworth County; was a good specimen of the old-fashioned pioneers, who have done so much to build up this country; had always lived at the western end of civilization, and as soon as land became improved, so that his cattle did not have a wide range, he was uneasy, and would sell out and be off further West. He had sold here, in 1852, and had located in Minnesota, and was preparing to remove his family when death put in his veto. I am afraid there were Ku-Klux, or Wide-Awakes, in those days, although they did not go by these names; but as Shakespeare says – "What's in a name?", etc. The early settlers generally respected claims. Uncle Job had jumped some claim, and refused to give it up; he was ku-kluxed one night by a delegation disguised, and, after a bold resistance by the family, in which an old sword and hot water was freely used, he was taken off to Lake Emily, to be put under the ice, but at the last moment a compromise was effected.

In this connection an amusing incident occurred. Uncle Job, previous to the threatened lynching, had become alarmed, from information he had received, and, knowing the then customs of the country and the characters he had wronged, expected trouble. So, one day, he came to F. R. Roberts and represented that the settlers were going to kill him because he had shown land to the Welshmen. Roberts and his brother David thought, in their innocence, that it was too bad that Uncle Job should be killed on their account, and that even if they lost their lives in consequence, they ought by right to go and protect him. They went, but found no one there. David left, but the other remained,

and in a very short time some men were seen advancing towards the house. Uncle Job ran up a ladder to the chamber, and Robinson Crusoe like, pulled it up after him; the old lady got out the old sword, and put it into Roberts' hands and posted him near the door; she then hid under the bed, and the daughters left the house. The men tried to come in, but Roberts brandished the sword so vigorously that the feat was impossible without the risk of losing a limb or two. They expostulated and explained in English, which was the only language they were masters of, and Roberts talked back in Welsh, for the reason that he did not know a word of any other language – but the old sword still threatened. In the meantime, however, one of the girls came around from her hiding place to the door, and found out that these men were travelers, and innocent of any murderous designs; she also tried to explain to Roberts in English but all to no purpose – the old sword still flourished menacingly. Roberts thought of nothing but saving the life of Uncle Job, which was placed in jeopardy on his account, and was determined “to fight it out on that line of it took all summer.” Finally, Uncle Job heard enough to satisfy him that he had nothing to fear from these men; so he came down from his hiding place, and the old lady from under the bed, and after numerous motions and signs Roberts was induced to give up the old sword, and the men allowed to come in.

Uncle Job, like N. Stevens and other speculators, made a business of locating settlers on government land at any price they could agree on, and then go or send to the Land Office at Green Bay and enter it. This same F. R. Roberts, in 1845, had paid Uncle Job for his land, and was preparing to build on his present homestead, when he found out, by a friend who overheard the conversation, that Uncle Job had planned a trick to get his son-in-law to enter the eighty acres of prairie which he (Roberts) had paid Perry for – Perry having all his money, which had been delivered to him without any witness or receipt. Roberts had no alternative but to immediately squat on it, and claim it under the pre-emption laws, and thus prevent it being purchased by others. As he happened to have a few boards, he immediately put up a small shanty on the prairie, and lived in it for four months, without any door to it, and by so doing he succeeded in saving his land, which he had previously paid for; but it was a very close thing – his preemption having been made at nine o'clock in the morning, and Perry's money, which he had furnished, having arrived at the Green Bay Land Office at three o'clock in the afternoon of the same day. Uncle Job was like all the old pioneers, kind and good-hearted, and willing to aid anyone in sickness or distress; a good neighbor, though sharp at a bargain; he was our first Town Assessor, but would not stand a re-election.

The first German who settled in this part of our state was Dr. Wm. O. Arch, a much respected and well informed man, who settled on Section 6, near the Fox River Marsh, in 1848; he still resides there, in the old log house. Through his influence, most of the numerous Germans, in this and the adjoining section of country, were induced to settle here.

The first school ever kept in town was kept at the log dwelling house of John Converse, in 1845. The first school house erected in town expressly for a school was made of logs, on government land, on section 11, by voluntary contribution of labor and material, and school taught there by Margaret Jones of Springvale, in the summer of 1846. The writer lived there for a few months; but in December of that year, the forty acres in was built on had been exchanged for another forty, and a dispute arose about the ownership of the schoolhouse, and one night it was secretly torn down and carried away, and so ended the first school house.

The first school house built after the School Districts were organized was build of logs, on Section 25, in school district No. 1.

The first, and until quite recently, the only store, in this town, was erected in 1846, by Elijah Dunlap and Milo E. Bradley, on the old Fort Winnebago road, and was the only one for a number of miles, and quite a business was done there for several years, by Dunlap A. Scott, and it was considered the nucleus of a village, and called Centerville. Squire Patton, of Scott, used to hold there what was called the "High Court of Centerville;" said store and one-horse tavern across the road, in the town of Scott, was all that ever came of it, excepting that a doctor set up there, for a short time, but it was so healthy that he had no practice, and left, and Centerville, though in a new country, was reckoned among the things that had been.

The first dwelling destroyed by fire was Mr. Blood's, on section 36, which was built of hay – no insurance. Insurance agents had not arrived yet.

The first road in this town was laid out and the sloughs bridged by the soldiers, for the purpose of getting their supplies, and was called the Fox Lake and Fort Winnebago road; and, though no regard was paid to section lines, yet a part of it is still used as a road; another, and older military road, from Fort Winnebago to Fort Howard, was and is now, located a little north of the town line.

The first election held in this section of our county, and in this town, was held at the house of John Langdon, in 1846, at which election M. W. Patton was elected Justice of the Peace for the four townships now called Courtland, Springvale, Scott and Randolph. The old house still stands, in a good state of preservation, and can be seen, any day, on the farm of Thos. Sanderson, between his house and the barn. The roof is shingled now, but for several years, it was covered with bark, which was held in it place with poles.

The first white child born in this town was a child of Henry Dantz, who settled on Section 10, in 1845, who was W. W. Dantz, of Princeton, and who was the assistant sergeant-at-arms in the Senate in 1871. Now deceased.

The first white death in the town was a child of James Lowell, who was buried on his farm, on section 13, as there were no cemeteries at that time. The first public cemetery was donated to the public by Job W. Perry, on section 12, and was, for a number of years, the only burial ground in town, and a great many were buried there, but the bodies have been mostly removed to the beautiful cemetery at Randolph Center, which was surveyed April 24, 1851.

All the first settlers avoided the prairies, having, somehow, formed the erroneous idea that no one could live and support himself there, because there was no timber, and but little water or marsh – three very important requisites in a new country; also, that the land was considered too poor to grow timber; too cold for man or beast to live on in the winter, and only fit for cattle to range on in summer; and some men thought that it would never be settled, and that they would get the use of it for pasture as long as they lived; consequently, you would find all the first settlements in the openings, at the edge of the timber, and near some spring of water – water and wood being the principal things looked for; and when land was purchased on the prairie it was generally for speculation, and the most of that was done after the Mexican land warrants came into market. The first man in this town, who was bold enough to venture clear out into the prairie was the late E. D. Hewit, in March, 1847, having been enticed there by a large spring of water and some marsh, on section 34, and lived there for several years, and raised crops without any fence, or any fear of being annoyed by roving cattle – his own cattle being tethered on the marsh.

The first name given to the town was Luzerne, but a dispute arising as to its orthography, some contending that the third letter should be “c”, some “a”, and others “z”, another meeting was called and its present name adopted. At a meeting of the county commissioners, held at Columbus, January 9<sup>th</sup>, 1849, it was decided that Township No. 13, north of range 12, east of the 4<sup>th</sup> principal meridian, should constitute the Town of Randolph. A strong effort had been made by a portion of the people of Scott to get the east half of the present Town of Scott attached to Randolph, but we preferred to go it alone, believing that a town six miles square was large enough. The County Commissioners designated the house of Oscar P. Hamilton, on Section 23 (now L. R. Allen’s) as the place for holding the first town meeting. The first town caucus was held at the house of Willard Perry, in section 22 (now known as the Gale Farm); a union ticket was proposed, but failed, and party tickets were nominated – Whig and Democratic. The first town meeting was held as stated above, on the 2<sup>nd</sup> day of April, 1849, and at the election of moderator of that meeting the first party battle was fought, resulting in a Democratic victory, John Converse having been elected Moderator and George Knowles Clerk. That election was considered a test vote, and the Whigs tried to change the result and the Democrats to retain what they had gained, and we had lively times, and party feeling ran high; but the Democratic ticket was elected, as the Whigs alleged, by illegal voting, and because the Democrats had the best horses. A few Englishmen who were working here, but whose families resided in the town of Scott, were arrested for illegal voting, and had a trial at the “High Court of Centerville.” They were defended by ex-governor James T. Lewis, but nothing came of it excepting hard feelings, and a great deal of party animosity, for several years, in town elections.

At the first town meeting, in the town of Randolph, the whole number of votes cast was 96; and, on Chairman of Supervisors, where the greatest effort was made, the vote stood 56 and 40.

The following were the first town officers elected:

Supervisors – William T. Whirry, Chairman, John W. Phillips, Powell Austin. Town Clerk – S. D. Hambleton. Assessor – Job W. Perry. Treasurer – Warren Campbell. School Superintendent – John Converse. Justices – Thomas B. Roberts, Francis Knowles, Powell Austin, John Converse. Constables – David R. Roberts, Lorenzo D. Farrington, James Knowles. Sealer of Weights and Measures – William T. Whirry.

The unsuccessful ticket was headed by Joseph Kerr, who was the first Member of Assembly from Columbia County, representing the whole county in the two first State Legislatures of 1848-9.

I had desired to give the first poll list kept at the election, but, unfortunately, I am unable to procure it. As the next best thing I give the poll list kept at the first general election, the fall succeeding the town meeting – present residents of the town designated by italics:

John Converse, Frederick J. Converse, William Bradshaw, Frederick Schroeder, Rufus Langdon, William H Mack, Elam E. Hewitt, George Knowles, James Lowell, Isaac Holcomb, Charles A. Richards, John Whirry, John W. Phillips, Robert Andrews, Powell Austin, Hezekiah Dunham, Phipps W. Hartwell, Abraham C. Langdon, Meltiah Sweat, William T. Whirry, Daniel P. Larkin, Edward Lewis, Richard H. Roberts, Ezra A Doolittle, Robert Hamilton, Warren Campbell, Benjamin Williams, Isaac Harris, Geo. W. Scott, Rodney Campbell, Richard Lewis, Elijah Dunlap, Aaren J. Gibson, Riley S. Richmond, William M. Torbert, Thomas Lewis, William M. Jones, William Harris, John N. Hardy, Hiram Perry, John Schroeder, John P. Converse, Charles Presba, James Knowles, William B. Presba, Henry A. Croaker, Willard L. Perry, J. S. Langdon, Greenleaf Ide, Henry Dantz, Rowland Langdon, Job W. Perry, Hiram W. Perry, Henry Hanson, James Taylor, Oscar F. Hamilton,

Thomas Williams, Stephen D. Hambleton, Joseph Thomas, Benj. E. Stanton, Joseph D. Stanton, Samuel S. Torbert, Henry L. Bessac, John W. Hinton, Joseph Kerr, Lorenzo D. Farrington, E. B. Finney.

At this election Nelson Dewey was the Democratic candidate for Governor, and Alex L. Collins was the Whig Candidate. Mr. Dewey received 32 votes and Mr. Collins 33 votes. At the same election the question of "equal suffrage to colored persons" was submitted to the electors – 25 votes were "yes" and 21 "no".

The total amount of tax on the first tax roll of the town was \$706.48, and the last, \$5,217.46.

The assessed valuation of the town, in 1849, was: real estate, \$62,885; personal property, \$1,672; total, \$64,557. In 1872, it was: real estate, \$503,806; personal property, \$104,336; total, \$608,182. What is called Kelly's addition to the Village of Cambria is located in town and includes forty acres of land north of the mill pond, and (including the buildings) was assessed in 1872 at \$5,378. The largest tax ever raised in town was \$8,930.28, in 1864, which included a war tax.

The Welsh Calvinistic Methodist Society up to 1854 had held their religious meetings in the old Lake Emily log school house and in private houses; but in the summer of that year they build a church edifice on land donated by F. R. Roberts, on section 12, in this town, and it was dedicated on the first Sabbath of December, 1854, the Rev. Thomas A. Roberts, Proscairon, and the Rev. John J. Roberts, of Columbus, Wisconsin, Officiating. The name of the church was declared to be Engedi, a Hebrew name signifying a fountain of pleasant waters. The cemetery adjoining the church is called Maephela, after the cave purchased by old Father Abraham. The first Trustees were J. W. Hughs, J. W. Jones and O. J. Jones. The Rev. John Daniels was their first and only pastor. The church was enlarged in 1870.

There were two other societies of the above denomination partly in this town; one has its church just north of the town line, in the town of Manchester, and the other on the town line in the town of Scott, and a German Lutheran Reform Church is also on the town line in the town of Scott; but as they are not located in town, the plan of this sketch precludes any further remarks, excepting that in 1869 the latter society purchased five acres of land on section 6, and built a parsonage on it.

The First Wesleyan Methodist Society of Randolph Center organized June 17<sup>th</sup>, 1858, and built a church on land donated by Z. W. Oliver, on section 22, principally through the instrumentality of Rev. John Willis, who had seceded from the M.E. Church. It was dedicated in October, 1858, by the Rev. A. C. Hand. The society is broken up, but its old members claim that they still own the church.

The Methodist Episcopal Society organized a class and Sabbath School at Randolph Center in 1849. They own no building, but for several years they have used the Wesleyan church, and hold religious services there every Sunday.

The German Catholic Church, on section 7, was built in 1861, on land donated by John G. Fisher. Religious services are held there occasionally by a priest from Beaver Dam.

The German Lutheran Society, under the guidance of the Rev. C. Diehlmann, worship a part of the time in the Town Hall.

In 1868, School District No. 3 having decided to build a new school house at Randolph Center, by mutual agreement the town build a stone basement under it for the purposes of a Town Hall, at a cost of \$642.05; furniture, \$77.50; total, \$719.55.

In 1871 Parkinson built a small store for the sale of groceries, at Randolph Center, and it is the only store in town. No license has ever been granted for the sale of beer or liquor, and none has ever been sold in town.

There are four school districts wholly in the town and seven parts of districts; four of the latter have their school houses located in town – total 8. District No. 12 is composed entirely of Germans, and in 1869 they built a stone school house on section 8. Joint District No. 10 is composed entirely of Welsh people, and in 1871 they built a new frame school house on section 19.

Randolph Center, at an early day, was platted as a village, but it never contained enough inhabitants for a set of village officers. In addition to what is mentioned elsewhere it contains a post office, blacksmith and wagon shop.

The celebrated Portage Prairie, which is a high, dry prairie, covers about two-fifths of the town, just barely passing north on the center line, on sections 15, 16, 17, and 18, in some places.

The northwest quarter of the town is composed of stoney and clayey openings generally, with considerable marsh, and is settled almost entirely by the industrious Germans. The northeast quarter of the town contains considerable marsh, some quite poor; also timber openings, and a small prairie covered with stony knolls, and is settled mostly by Welsh. It is thought by some to contain considerable mineral, although it is doubtful whether it is sufficiently accessible to make it profitable. On the southwest quarter, just north of Cambria, there is nearly three sections of very rough, clayey openings and timber, including a good stone quarry. The northeast portion of the southeast quarter is openings and marsh.

It has generally been supposed that the prairie extended all over the town. That erroneous idea originated in this way; The old Fox Lake and Fort Winnebago road, which took all the travel at an early day, passed through the prairie, and but little was seen but prairie in all directions.

What streams we have in town start from springs, except the one on the marsh, on section 1, through which the small outlet of Lake Emily runs. We are pretty well up in the world, having a position on the boundary or divide between the Valley of the Mississippi and the Valley of the St. Lawrence, and on many farms the rain as it falls divides and finds its way to the ocean by different routes, a portion by the Gulf of Mexico and a portion by the St. Lawrence, so we have no fears of the greatest freshet doing us any damage. But I must not omit to mention that the celebrated Fox River takes its rise here at Lake Sarah, on the line between section 4 and 5. It is not much of a lake, however, and once or twice, to my knowledge, during the time of our great droughts, it became perfectly dry, and at other times it is only a pretty good duck pond; but, nevertheless, it has been honored with the name of lake. I presume it must have been a wet time when it was named.

The war of the great rebellion, which commenced by the attack on Fort Sumter, at 4:30 p.m., April 12, 1861, and terminated by the surrender of Gen. Lee, April 6, 1865, formed one of the most important periods in the history of the United States and every true patriot will look back with pride to the part which the Town of Randolph took in that great struggle to preserve the Union – Democrats and Republicans, with very few exceptions, working hand in hand; but few of our townsmen ran away to avoid military service; but few voted against raising the necessary tax, or shirked or avoided

subscribing money to procure volunteers, and only a very few attempted to make money by the war and remain at home; but it is a lamentable fact that, notwithstanding our war record is fully up to the average, yet we were cursed with a few of each of the above classes, and it is a well known fact that a great many of our so-called patriots were such only from fear of being drafted into the military service; but, on the whole, the town did well, and filled its quota on every call of the President for volunteers, without allowing a draft to take place, excepting under the law ordering a draft, and allowing a commutation of \$300 ea – and even among the less wealthy German Democrats, when a committee had been appointed to raise the last subscription, at the darkest period of the war, the chairman of that committee reported that all the Germans had paid their proportion of said subscription except two, and that these two had enlisted. All other committees reported a deficiency, and although a few individuals might be named to whom a few poultry dollars and their miserable carcasses were to them more valuable than country, yet the number was so small that we can afford to let them enjoy their unenviable reputation, and console ourselves with the reflection that so large a majority of the town did so well. The people generally did better than the government, and responded to the unjust and unreasonable calls for men, though the objectionable Provost Marshal system, with astonishing promptness. Out of a population of 1,166, according to the census of 1860, and of 2,120, according to the census of 1865, which included men of all ages, women and children, and, on a fair enrollment, but little over 100 able-bodied men, between the ages of 20 and 45, the town furnished 82 volunteers, 3 veterans (re-enlisted men), and 8 drafted men – total 93; but, according to the peculiar system of arithmetic invented by Provost Marshal General Fry, caliming a three years man a unit, we were only credited with 81 men – some of our early enlistments being for one year. Through the kindness of the Hon. Bl. Breese, Secretary of State, I am able to furnish the following statement from the public records, showing the number of vouunteers and drafted men credited to the Town of Randolph, under the different calls made by the President during the war of the rebellion, to-wit;

Credited up to date of October 12, 1862	8
Recruits under calls made since that date	61
Drafted men credited	8
Veterans credited	3
Credited by order of the War Department	<u>1</u>
Total	81

The last item we received credit for after the war was over, the Provost Marshal sending a letter informing us that we were entitled to a credit of one and that would balance our account with the War Department. It will no doubt appear strange to some that our enrolled list should have been apparently so nearly exhausted. One reason was that a large number of our volunteers were procured from other places; but the principal reason was what we called the dishonesty of the Provost Marshal's office, in not allowing a correction of our enrollment, after it had been represented to them that said list was double the size it should be, and as proven by the militia list just taken by the writer. Our first enrollment was taken by Daniel Wells; the second was taken by J. M. Bay, who corrected the spelling of a great number of the names, adding middle letters and full Christian names, all of which the Provost Marshal added to the first enrollment as new names, and in addition retained all those who had enlisted, or left the State, or had died, or were aliens, and would listen to no proof to establish these facts; consequently, our enrolled list contained about double the number of names it of right out to contain, and the town was called on to furnish a great many more men than by right it aught to have furnished – for instance, we were called on for twenty-seven men to fill one call of the President, when we thought we were ahead. As the above facts in relation to enrollment were generally known, it caused some excitement, and a special town meeting was called and the writer and J. M. Bay were

appointed a committee to go to Madison and Janesville to get the enrollment corrected; but neither the Provost Marshal, at Madison, or his deputy, at Janesville, would do anything for our relief, and the writer made a second and third trip, and after a great deal of trouble, and by laying the case before His Excellency James T. Lewis, the then Governor, and through his strenuous exertions, a telegram came from Washington, apparently allowing a correction of the enrollment of the State, but, no doubt, intended for a peremptory refusal, by granting it as they conceived on the impossible condition of its being performed in the time allotted; but, although we were only allowed three days to do it in, by working night and day we succeeded in getting our list reduced about one-half, notwithstanding the obstacles thrown in the way by the Deputy Provost Marshal's office, and their very stringent requirements to prove alienship and over-age – the result was that after the correction of the enrollment and the correction of our credits, our quota under said call was reduced to nine, being a saving to the town of eighteen men, worth \$300 each. But in this connection the sad spectacle was witnessed of the Governor of the great State of Wisconsin being snubbed by a subordinate United States officer, and through him the whole State, and very forcibly illustrates the familiar lines of Shakespeare:

“But man, proud man,  
Clothed in a little brief authority,  
Plays such fantastic tricks before high Heaven  
As make the angels weep.”

Poor angels! What a daily weeping, for nearly four years, over the fantastic tricks of about 270 domineering Provost Marshals! It is well known that the State Rights question had been carried to the extreme in the seceded States, and as one extreme generally follows another, the Government during the war adopted the opposite extreme by ignoring States altogether, and to do so adopted the Provost Marshal System; and all calls for volunteers were made through that office, instead of through the Governor, as the law directly; and if a Governor interfered (no matter how much he was in the right, the times being so much out of joint), he was accused of disloyalty; but Governor Lewis stood up manfully, and saved the State considerable injustice.

At a mass meeting held in 1862, the first bounty was offered volunteers, the said meeting promising to each person who should enlist into the military service a bounty of \$70 – the amount to be raised by subscription. Twenty-one men enlisted under that promise, mostly our own townsmen, but that subscription was very badly managed, or, strictly speaking, too much managed, and the subscribers cheated; but, although the volunteers did not get their money according to promise, the town, deciding that it would cost too much to get it out of the committee, voted to raise by tax \$200, to supply the deficiency, and they were all paid. The subsequent subscriptions of 1864-64 were also very badly managed, to say the least. The subscription money and the town taxes of the committees could unravel the snarl, and to straighten it up the town voted to raise by tax \$268.50 to supply that deficiency.

The town voted three separate war taxes, the first 4,000 dollars, and the two last \$3,800 each, amounting in the aggregate to \$11,600, but

The volunteers were paid, including \$336.07 for interest	\$12,136.07
Deficiencies mentioned above	468.50
For services and expenses	<u>409.78</u>
 Total amount raised by tax	 \$13,012.35
 The several committees reported amount raised by subscription	 5,093.25

Commutation paid by seven drafted men	<u>2,100.00</u>
Total amount paid out by the town on account of war	\$20,207.60

The town records show that 34 volunteers received a bounty from the town taxes of \$200 each, and 26 received \$150 each. What the others received cannot be ascertained; neither can it be ascertained exactly how many residents of the town went to war, but it is estimated that the number was about 50, and under the law ordering a draft and allowing the privilege of paying a commutation fee of \$300, 10 men were drafted, 7 paid \$300 each, 1 went to the war, 1 was excused, and 1, a German farm hand, who was, fortunately for him, blest with such a jaw-breaking and difficult name to spell, was never notified, as by the time his name got back from the Provost Marshal's office it was quite another name, and the fellow remained in town perfectly ignorant of the fact that he was one of Uncle Sam's soldiers. As the poet says, "If ignorance is bliss, the folly to be wise."

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR-WILLIAM T. WHIRRY (from History of Columbia County)

A booklet of 24 pages was printed in 1873, by this Gentleman, titled, "The Town of Randolph—Columbia County, WIS. Its Settlement, First Settlers, Incidents, Etc., Including its transactions during the WAR OF THE GREAT REBELLION, By William T. Whirry, Randolph, Wis. Printed by the Office of The Randolph Enterprise."

The Columbia County History of 1880, tells that Mr. Whirry was a native of England. He came to this county at an early age, taking up residence in Randolph and sharing with his few neighbors, all the hardships incident to the settling up of a new county. Twenty years ago (1860), he was elected to the Assembly from the northern district of this county, and discharged the duties of the position with rare judgment and unquestioned fidelity.

He died at his residence in the Village of Randolph, the 18<sup>th</sup> day of November 1874. He was the Supervisor of the West Ward of the village and left a sickbed to come up to the county seat, the week of his death, to attend to his official duties. But he was unable to meet with the board, except on a single occasion, and it was apparent to all, that he was undergoing great bodily suffering at that time. He returned to his room at the hotel. But his associates on the board freely expressed their fears that he would never meet with them again. Their fears were soon confirmed, his time had come. He was about sixty-five years old.

In April 1950, Paul Schreiber, the Clerk of the Town Board of the Township of Randolph, authored a "Centennial History of the Town of Randolph, 1849-1950." In his preface he wrote this; in the summer of 1947, I was asked by the Town Board to write a history of the Township, having to do with the Town records for over 30 years. He also stated "I shall begin by taking as my textbook, a book written by Wm. T. Whirry—I shall follow up Mr Whirry's work trying to come somewhere near his ability, but not try to be his equal".