



**The Quarterly Bulletin of the
RIPLEY COUNTY, INDIANA, HISTORICAL SOCIETY, INC.**
Library – 125 Washington Street
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▲ The Ripley Co. Historical Society will meet Sunday July 12, at 2:00 at the Archive Library on the west side of Versailles Courthouse Square. Susan Walters from Jennings Co. Tourism Dept. will dress in period costume and give a program about the Civil War era. Everyone interested in history and genealogy is invited to attend.

▲ **RCHS Director Changes:** The term of Center Twp. Director, Norris E. Krall, has expired and he has resigned from his position after 14 years of service. Bill Gloyd, current Director-at-Large has resigned his position to accept the Center Twp. position and Michael Stratton, our Ripley County Historian, has been named Director-at-Large.

▲ The WWII Veterans book (**LEST WE FORGET**) is progressing. God willing, the book honoring and remembering our WWII veterans will be published in 2010. The authors have over 3,000 veterans with Ripley County ties.

▲ **The Versailles State Park** entrance site will soon have a newly constructed park office and conservation office building. It will be covered with Ripley County Limestone, similar to many of the older park buildings that were constructed by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) during the 1930's. The statute, sponsored by RCHS, of the CCC worker, will be placed in the front of the building. Completion is expected in October 2009.

▲ **Our neighbor to the south**, the city of Madison in Jefferson County, had been cleaning, repairing, etc. to make the city ready for their Bicentennial Celebration in June. On May 20, a construction crew was soldering the gutters on the Courthouse Dome when a fire started in the dome. The 154-year old building's tower, roof and top floor were damaged beyond repair. Great care is currently being taken to save the precious court records. Of course, the courthouse will be repaired and the Historical River City of Madison will be as beautiful as ever.



▲ **Our neighbor to the north**, the city of Greensburg in Decatur County, is celebrating their Sesquicentennial this month. Greensburg is famous all over the world as the place where a tree grows on top of the courthouse clock tower. Several years ago when Decatur County published their County History Book, they submitted a picture to be used on the cover that showed the tree on the clock tower. The printer thought it was a smudge and removed the tree from the picture before printing the books. What a shame!!!



▲ RCHS received a request from Harry S. Graves for photos from our area to be included in a photohistory of Indiana train wrecks. If anyone is interested please contact: Book Project, PO Box 272, Salem, IN 47167 or capt_graves@peoplepc.com

THE FOLLOWING BOOKS ARE AVAILABLE:

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|--|------|--|-------|
| <i>Ripley County History, Volume 1</i> | \$65 | <i>Versailles, IN School Life 1818-1966</i> | \$ 20 |
| <i>Brown Twp.. Tales</i> by Alan Smith | 20 | <i>Osgood, IN Sesquicentennial 1856-2006</i> | 17 |
| <i>Tales of Versailles</i> by Alan Smith | 16 | <i>Come Visit</i> by Jean McClellan | 25 |
| <i>Vintage Postcards</i> by Alan Smith | 20 | <i>Jackson Township Cemetery Index</i> | 13 |
| <i>Brown Township Cemetery Index</i> | 10 | <i>Johnson Township Cemetery Index</i> | 10 |
| <i>Milan, Indiana. A Storied Past</i> | 16 | Shipping Charges added for all books | 3 |

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

Check your label to make certain your dues are paid up-to-date thru **2009**. **If not, mail your renewal to RCHS at P.O. Box 525, Versailles, IN 47042**
Annual \$10; Life \$100.

RIPLEY COUNTY HISTORICAL SOCIETY MINUTES – April 19, 2009

The spring quarterly meeting of the Society was called to order by Vice President Betty Roepke, standing in for President Welch, at 2:00 P.M., April 19, 2009. Betty led the attendees in the Pledge of Allegiance. Each of the attendees (some thirteen (13) in number), as requested, identified themselves by name and township of residence.

Secretary Frank Keenan read the minutes of the winter quarterly meeting of January 11, 2009, which minutes were approved as read.

Owen Menchhofer, Assistant Treasurer, gave a report of the Society's current finances, which report was approved as read.

Vice President Roepke reported that new shelving had been purchased with grant funds from the Ripley County Community Foundation and were installed upstairs at the Archives Building; Betty took photos of same for those who were unable to climb the stairs and view this new shelving. Betty also advised that a copy of Alan Smith's "A Century of School" was available at the Archives. Betty additionally noted that the basketball hall of fame display case had been delivered, and, as all could see, was placed in the first floor front room of the Archives building.

Betty further noted that volunteers for duty at the Archives Building (Monday through Friday, 1:00 P.M. to 4:00 P.M.) were still needed and that, additionally, the position of County Historian remains vacant.

The Nominating Committee reported that: Lois Workman was willing to serve another term as a Director representing Delaware Township; Norris Krall was willing to serve one year only as a Director for the three (3) year term representing Center township; Frank Keenan was willing to serve another term as a Director representing Brown Township; Cheryl Welch was willing to serve another year as President; and Frank Keenan was willing to serve another year as Secretary.

Concerning progress on the World War II Ripley County Veterans Book Project, Norris Krall reported that 99% of the book's manuscript text has been written, and that preliminary estimates for the printing/publishing costs of the WWII Veterans' Book project were between \$25,000.00 to \$35,000.00

Helen Einhaus reminded attendees that RCHS member David Dreyer would be delivering a lecture at the Batesville Library on the 2000th anniversary of an important battle in the ancient world on Tuesday, April 21, 2009, at 7:00 o'clock P.M.

There being no further business to come before the membership, the business meeting was closed.

Following the business meeting, the program was given by Wilbur Myers. Wilbur related several unique and interesting tales and observations concerning his Army service in post-war occupied Germany. As Wilbur related, he and twelve other Hoosiers traveled by Army bus from Indiana to Ft. Leonard Wood in Missouri for basic training, following which he was shipped out via New York City and Southampton, England, disembarking in Bremerhaven, Germany, and then by train to his posting in Frankfurt, Germany.

Wilbur's service in the 1950s Army was filled with memorable experiences, not the least of which was his experiencing his first hurricane, Hurricane Betsy, a particularly violent and destructive storm in New York and New England, which struck New York while he was waiting to be shipped out.

Illustrating that European friend and foe alike were anxious to avoid any vivid reminders of war, such as uniformed United States Army personnel on their streets, Wilbur noted that the soldiers aboard the ship were not allowed to go ashore when the troop-carrying ship docked at Southampton, and within Germany, American soldiers on leave were required to wear civilian clothing only, and not their uniforms. Recalling some of his leaves, Wilbur related how he traveled to many places in Germany, such as Bremerhaven, Hanover, and Hamburg. A leave scheduled for Berlin, which required traveling through the Russian zone of occupation (East Germany) had been approved, but, due to "trouble," was cancelled at the last minute.

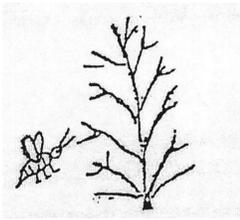
Defying the maxim that "you can't keep them down-on-the-farm-after they've seen Patee," Wilbur did return to his post in Frankfort and eventually back to Holton.

Wilbur related two unusual "Hoosier connections" while stationed in Germany. One such connection was a friendship he developed with a former German soldier who had been captured during the War by the Americans and imprisoned as a POW during the rest of the War, in Austin, Indiana. The other connection occurred when, while on leave in France, and visiting the American Cemetery (a sea of white crosses bearing only the name, serial number, hometown, and State of the buried soldier) Wilbur quickly came across the grave of a soldier from Nebraska, Indiana, just down the road from Holton in Jennings County.

Wilbur had numerous photos to show, which he had taken with a camera bought in Germany. He also had a prized 1897 coin portraying Kaiser Wilhelm. Wilbur remembered paying \$11.25 for it.

Following Wilbur's presentation attendees gave Wilbur a round of applause for relating his many interesting experiences during his post-war service in Germany. Refreshments were served by Franklin Township. Visiting time was enjoyed by all. Jackson Township will be responsible for refreshments for the summer meeting.

Respectfully submitted: Frank A. Keenan, Secretary



Bea's Buzzing Around the Family Tree Retires Time marches on and the present becomes history... the interesting folk-lore type stories and opinions shared by Bea Boyd for many years in the RCHS Newsletter as "Bea's Buzzing" page, has now become history. A decline in health has forced Bea to retire. In an interview with Bea on June 10, 2009, at her cozy home in Holton, we talked about many of her life-time activities.

Historian & Genealogist Bea has been a member of the Ripley County Historical Society for many years serving as Director from Otter Creek Township, as Secretary and was Treasurer for many years. Beatrice was appointed County Historian in 1981 and served for twenty years. She did research for people from all over the United States and several foreign countries. Bea is appreciated for her intelligence, quick and interesting wit and friendly personality. She has been a great representative for RCHS.

Family Tree One of Bea's ancestors was wounded in battle in Georgia during the Civil War. In 1836, the first Beach family moved from Gerrard County, Kentucky to Otter Creek Township in Ripley County, Indiana near the Otter Creek. The size of the family grew and the area became known as Beaches Corner. Several of the Beach men became stone cutters and worked in the quarry west of Holton that later became Lake William. Bea's parents were Everett and Louise Stegmann Beach. Their children were Mildred, Jesse, Wilbur, Woodrow, Mary, Beatrice, and George.

School Days Bea was born in Osgood and attended two years of school there, before her parents moved to a farm on Covered Bridge Road in Otter Creek Township. Her remaining school days were spent at Holton. Beautiful Bea Beach had blond hair, blue eyes, was about 5 feet 3 inches tall and weighted around 100 lbs. (a size she maintained). While in high school, with co-cheerleader, Ruth Brower, she wrote the words to the Warhorses Basketball Team's fight song. It soon became the official school song. Bea graduated with the class of 1939, and also graduated from Central Beauty School in Indianapolis. Bea has served as President and Treasurer of the Holton Alumni Association and helped fellow Holton graduates, Michael Stratton and Joan Krall compile and publish the popular Holton School Book. She has long been recognized as the Holton Historian.



Life- Family & Work Bea married Harold Nealis in 1941, they lived in Indianapolis until Harold was inducted into military service during WWII. Bea and little son, Donald, (Donnie), returned to Ripley County. With the failure of her marriage she became a single working Mom. To supplement her home-based Beauty Shop Business she worked at Seagrams in Lawrenceburg and Muscatatuck State Hospital at Butlerville. After completing an accounting course, she worked for Neal's Ford Agency in Osgood and finally for the Ripley County Welfare Department at Versailles. Bea 2nd married Donald Boyd, they lived in Holton, she still lives there today. They traveled quite a lot with Don's work. Don Boyd died in 1976. Bea's son, Donnie had two children Randy and Rae Jean. Randy's death in an auto accident at age 16 was a terrible blow for the family. Today, Donnie and wife, Mary, live near Holton and Rae Jean lives at Versailles. They enjoy a close-knit family circle.



Bea at her home in Holton.

Holton Christian & Holton Cemetery Bea joined the Christian Church at age 21 and over the years served in many ways such as Adult Sunday School Class teacher (for more years than she can remember) and in different capacities in the church and the ladies' group. Bea has served as President of the Holton Cemetery Association since 1969.

Thanks Bea for all the lives you have touched with your helping hands!



Bea at Holton Post Office



Early Ripley County History

Gordon's Leap The setting for this interesting drama was the Cliff Hill Cemetery in Versailles in the year of 1846. The cemetery is located in the northeast section of town. At the north end of the grave yard is a cliff that today overlooks the lake in the Versailles State Part about 150 feet below. In 1846 there was no lake there but the Laughery Creek and valley was located at the bottom of the bluff. Versailles was the home of a Medical Seminary located in a three story building, on the southwest corner of the Courthouse Square. The building was later occupied by the Purdum's Furniture and Appliance Store. Some records state that Jonathan Gordon, John Glass and Bernard Mullen were among the students attending the Medical Seminary. Some other records state that Jonathan Gordon was a doctor and the other two men were medical students who he solicited to help him in the illegal act. As the story goes, a woman (some records indicate a man, but the general opinion is that it was a woman) died in the community and the cause of death was unknown. Dr. Gordon asked permission of the family to hold a post-mortem, hoping that he might discover the cause of death and possibly save someone else's life at a future time. The family refused to allow the postmortem. Dr. Gordon and the medical students were passionate about finding the cause of the death and decided to dig up the body after the burial and perform an autopsy. Plans were made to meet at the grave- site around midnight. The family or the police suspected they might try to "rob the grave" and posted a guard in the cemetery. The guard saw the men digging and alerted the townspeople. Gordon, Glass and Mullen were busy digging when the angry mob arrived to arrest them. Glass nearly got caught but in a panic he ran blindly over the precipice. His sense of direction wasn't all that bad, because he landed in the branches of an elm tree growing some 75 feet below out of the side of the cliff. He was battered and bruised, but the tree saved his life. After that the cliff was referred to as "Gordon's Leap". While all three men escaped, Glass and Mullen were eventually caught and indicted but never were brought to trail. Both men went on to become successful doctors. Jonathan W. Gordon, the man who had a leap named after him for a leap he didn't make, reportedly fled to Mexico. About a year later he returned to Indiana to eventually make a name for himself as a criminal lawyer.

Fact or Fiction?? The grave of the woman, who was the wife of a Ben Caplin, was located near Gordon's Leap. Her 4½ foot long headstone was marred with a bullet hole received on that eventful night long ago. In later years, the headstone crumbled to the ground. **Fact or Fiction??** (A different slant on the historical drama). The infamous "hanging tree," where 5 members of the Levi outlaw gang were lynched, was located on the summit of what was known as Town Hill. The bodies hung within a few yards of a great precipitous bluff that was almost perpendicularly to the depth of more than 200 feet. Not far away was the spot made famous by Jonathan W. Gordon, late Attorney-General for the state of Indiana, who in his young days, when pursued for grave-robbing, amazed his would-be-captors by boldly leaping over the bluff into the dark chasm below. But he miraculously escaped death by lodging in the top branches of a tree more than 100 feet beneath the top of the bluff and escaped capture. **Fact or Fiction??** (A well-documented fact.) Included in the five outlaws hanged at Versailles in 1897 was a handsome young man from a good family in the Osgood area named Clifford Gordon. He was a nephew of Dr. Gordon of the Gordon's Leap fame. Clifford Gordon was buried in a cemetery near Nebraska, Indiana in Jennings County.

Another version of Gordon's Leap The following item was taken from the Versailles Republican of May 15, 1884. For many years the topic of the truth or falsity of the leap, said to have been made by Major Jonathan W. Gordon, down the precipices at the Versailles cemetery, whilst he was a young medical student, has been debated. The exact spot where he was said to have gone over was pointed out to the writer, when the Major (Jonathan Gordon) was in attendance. We asked him if we had been correctly informed as to the locality. As he had visited the spot the day before, he was certain as to the place from which he leaped. But he says he jumped from a tree that stood upon the verge of the bluff and now that tree is not only gone but ten or more feet of the bank is gone. At all events, it was a fearful leap. One of the men, who was with him, also jumped and received severe injuries. But the Major was more fortunate. He went down a declivity of at least 120 feet...the first 50 feet being almost perpendicular and from thence to the bottom so steep that one can scarcely climb it, even now. In those days (1846) subjects for dissection were not easily obtained (as they are now- in 1884) and the medical students were daring enough to obtain a "stiff" by stealth. Such was the mission upon which the Major and his companions entered the cemetery to secure a subject for the dissecting table. A black man had just been buried there, and it was his body the students were after. But the noise they made attracted attention and persons visiting (entering) the cemetery to ascertain what was going on, so frightened the students that they had no choice in choosing the route of escape. Two of them went over the precipice. What became of the other man who had the limb broken, we never heard, but the man who went down unscathed, Major Jonathan Gordon, lives to be honored as a scholar, a statesman, a soldier-one of Indiana's- a lawyer of distinction, who has won his laurels by meritorious conduct; a speaker who can enlist, by his power and eloquence, the attention of an intelligent auditory. The Major, upon every visit to Versailles, seeks a grave in the cemetery marked by a Scotch granite headstone, where he laid away, years ago, one of his loved ones. Some of the Major's enthusiastic admirers talk of setting up a stone to mark the spot of Gordon's Leap".

This sounds like a story for "Believe it or Not".

Early Ripley County History

As reported by Gayle Eads in "Chips from an Old Chopping Block"

If any person deserves credit for the collection of material and data about Ripley County, certainly a good share of the votes should go to Violet Eliza Toph. She gave much of her life in time and effort to collecting, classifying and writing about the county and its people. Violet, as everyone called her, was born December 29, 1878 near Elrod. She attended the public schools and became a teacher after training at Hanover College. She was never married and after the death of her parents lived in Versailles where she was active in the Baptist Church. On July 4, 1921 when the Ripley County Historical Society was founded there were 20 charter members. Mrs. Minnie E. Wycoff of Batesville was elected president and Violet became the secretary.

The Society outlined an ambitious program which included the intent to collect and house items of historical interest to collect and preserve maps, records, deeds, public documents, private correspondence, public and private cemetery records, family histories, church and school records, and almost anything else that reflected the life and time of the early settlers.

On December 4, 1931 the surviving members of the Captain C.C. Wheeler Post, G. A. R. deeded their building in Versailles and its contents to the Society as the basis for a museum.

As a person Violet was plain in appearance and shy in manner. Her obsession with things of a historical nature caused people to look upon her as a kind of "historical nut" and those with out any particular interest in such things tried to keep out of her way. For years she drove a horse and buggy on her trips about the county. In later years she actually hitch hiked to a cemetery or some other place of interest to make her endless notes and returned with them to her ancient typewriter. Among some of her papers the old typewriter showed a disabled key which took the small letter "o" out of service. This didn't bother Violet, she just used the figure "0" instead. Several volumes of her papers and index are at the Ripley County Historical Society Archives.

From article in the Osgood Journal by Gayle Eads.

The businessmen and residents of **Holton** had plans to incorporate their town in order to provide better services and to work toward improvement and growth. This brought to mind the story about how Holton was planned and the name selected as well as other items of interest. Jesse L. Holman seems to have the credit for the location in the first place. He owned considerable land in the area and decided to lay out a new town at the point where a north and south road crossed the railroad. In the early part of 1852, he built a store and a saloon, which were one and the same in those days. Henry Yater, a son-in-law, and Samuel Cady helped him lay out the site. They wanted to name it Holman, but Jesse objected. Perhaps he was too modest. He finally agreed to Holtown, which easily became Holton. Soon he built the first saw mill and then a flour mill. These were followed by a school with the idea that such a move would attract settlers and sell land.

It must be said for the citizens of Holton that they have always had a strong civic pride and rallied to the support of their own community. Good evidence of this was their support of their school and their athletic teams. The late Hallie "Doc" Myers, who had a drugstore there, sent articles to the county papers about their basketball team wins which well exceeded their losses, tagging them with the name **Warhorses**. Osgood not wanting to be out-publicized, took on the name of **Cowboys**, claiming they would ride the Warhorses. This rivalry lasted until both schools were forced into consolidation.

County, Indiana, Historical



OFFICERS and DIRECTORS

- Adams Twp. - Mrs Betty Roepke; 9644 E Co Rd 1300 N, Sunman, IN 47041 Vice President
- Brown Twp. - Mr. Frank Keenan, 3241 E State Rd 62, Cross Plains, IN 47017 Secretary
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- Delaware Twp. - Mrs. Lois Workman; 4823 N Co Rd 350 E, Osgood, IN 47037
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- Otter Creek Twp. - Mrs. Beatrice Boyd; P.O.Box 83 Holton, IN 47023**
- Shelby Twp-Mrs. Cheryl Welch; 6453 S Co Rd 225 W, Versailles, IN 47042 President & Museum Curator
- Washington Twp. - Mr. Henry Walker; 1721 N Co Rd 575 E, Milan, IN 47031
- Director at Large - Mr. Michael Stratton, 4300 W U.S. 50, Holton, IN 47023

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