On a cold and rainy Saturday, May 12, 2018, the Col. Hans C. Heg, Camp #15 of the Sons of Union Veterans commemorated the service of Isaiah Ryan by placing a marble marker indicating that he is the last known Union Civil War veteran buried in Walworth County, Wisconsin.

The event took place at Oak Hill Cemetery in Lake Geneva and was attended by members of the Allied Orders to include the DUVCW, Mary Chesebro Lee, Tent #23, the Women’s Relief Corps #71-W.H. Bennett, and the Ladies Auxiliary #4 of the Sons of the Union Veterans. In addition members of the Board of Directors of the Walworth County Historical Society were in attendance along with interested civilian representatives from the area.

Of special note was the surprise attendance of Ryan’s descendants to include his 95 year old granddaughter, Ruth Smith-Khedroo, great granddaughters Gayla Stein and Betty Allen and great great grandson, Daniel Immega.

Private Ryan was a volunteer in the 193rd New York Infantry under the command of Col. John B. Van Petten. His unit was recruited near the end of the Civil War and mustered into service in March and April of 1865. The 193rd was assigned to the 3rd Brigade, 3rd Division, Army of the Shenandoah where Ryan was a dispatch rider through the Cumberland Gap. After July 1865, they were assigned to the District of West Virginia, Middle Department. Ryan was mustered out of service at Harpers Ferry in January of 1867. Ryan was born in Fowler, New York on July 4, 1847. Ryan was educated in the schools of New (See “Veteran,” Page 8)
Women in Walworth County History: Asenath Dunlap McKaig

By Ruth Wales Isham

“One Hundred and seventeen years have passed away since the close of the Revolutionary War--nearly time enough for three generations t have come and gone. To the younger people of the day, the Revolution seems almost ancient as the wars of the Greeks and Romans, yet today, January first 1901, there are a few people living whose fathers were among the heroes of that war.

Asenath Dunlap was born in Ovid, Seneca county, New York, Dec. 12, 1811. John Dunlap who came to America, was born in Tyrone county, Ireland in 1718. Robert, his son, was born in 1737. He married three times. Asenath was a daughter of his second wife; John, son of the first wife, came west and was one of the early settlers of Geneva [township in Walworth County, Wisconsin] in 1839.

Robert Dunlap fought in the Revolution and three of his sons served in the War of 1812. Asenath Dunlap came with her half-brother to Wisconsin in 1839. In 1840 she married Thomas McKaig, a member of the government surveying party. Mrs. McKaig states that she can clearly remember hearing her father talk with the neighbors about his service in the war but does not recall his mentioning what regiment he was in or any battles in which he fought.

With her husband she began housekeeping on the farm near Duck [now Como] Lake, Geneva township, where the major part of her life was spent. She, like other pioneer women, spun, wove, and knit, furnishing to the family those comforts which at the time they were unable to secure. With these and other home duties she gave time to her church and also kept in touch with the affairs of the day.

Not long ago the Society of the Daughters of the Revolution presented Mrs. McKaig with a souvenir spoon which she highly prized.

March 25, 1906, Mrs. McKaig passed away. Almost to the last she possessed good health and strong vitality. She read a great deal and kept informed on the various topics of the day. Her memory of recent occurrences, as well as those of her earlier life, is remarkable.”


Notes from the Reinke Resource Center

Hundreds of post cards, dozens of indenture documents and maps, as well as hundreds of legal documents are all among the materials that are being carefully reorganized at the Doris M. Reinke Resource Center at 210 South Washington Street in Elkhorn. For several months volunteers have been hard at work reorganizing the archives at the center to make them more accessible, better preserve them and keep them safe. This requires an orderly process of many many hours of work to bring the massive amounts of documents into useable condition and organization while at the same time preserving them for future use.

At the same time the regular routine at the center goes on--answering phone calls and e-mails and helping people who stop by to do research on their families or houses or anything to do with the history of Walworth County and/or Wisconsin.

If you would like to be of help in this process call 262-723-7848.
In recent months the Board of Directors of Walworth County Historical Society has accepted the following artifacts into the general collection of the Society:


It is through donations such as these that Walworth County Historical Society continues its mission to “…collect, preserve and share the rich history of Walworth County, Wisconsin and the United States.”

### Upcoming WCHS Programs

The following programs will be held at Heritage Hall, 103 East Rockwell Street, Elkhorn, WI on the dates and times given. For further programming and events consult our website at www.walcohistory.com

**July 19th 3:00 p.m. “Life of Walter Cronkite**

![Walter Cronkite](image)

**August 9th 3:00 p.m. “History of Hats”**

![Hat](image)

**August 16th 3:00 p.m. “Life of Amelia Earhart”**

![Amelia Earhart](image)
A testament to their continued faith in and importance of the education of their children, the early settlers of Walworth County eventually established over 100 rural schools throughout the county by the 1890s. Earliest school situations involved a few families children meeting at a neighbor’s home. According to Albert C. Beckwith in his HISTORY OF WALWORTH COUNTY 1912, “Private enterprise had taken the first steps, for American matrons and maidens could not and would not suffer the young children to lose more than one school year in transit from a land of schools [East Coast States] to the last home of the Pottawatomies [sic].” As a part of early government in the towns, county commissioners gave important attention to the creation of school districts by setting aside land in each town for the purpose of education. Commissioners were appointed for the purpose of attending to school concerns in each district. They held joint meetings in Elkhorn and East Troy to establish criteria for town schools, in “...That a well organized system of common schools is indicative of an intelligent and enlightened community.” Text books were recommended and courses for common school teachers were suggested.


Pictured above is Star Center School, Bloomfield Township, Walworth County Wisconsin. It is one of may dozens of school photographs that are part of the Amon Collection at the Doris M. Reinke Resource Center of the Walworth County Historical Society. Nearly 100 of the original land grant patent documents, class photographs, written stories of county schools, as well as other documents and photographs are stored in the archives at the center.

-BENJAMIN FRANKLIN
This map of rural schools (highlighted in yellow) was prepared by Ken Amon as a part of his extensive research and study of early schools in Walworth County. It shows that over 100 rural schools had been established in the county by the late 1800’s. The culmination of Amon’s work, including photographs and/or drawings of nearly every one-room rural school that ever existed in the county, has been donated to the Walworth County Historical Society and resides at the Doris M. Reinke Resource Center at 210 South Washington Street in Elkhorn, WI for present and future study by historians and researchers interested in the rich history of Walworth County.
The following article appeared in the Whitewater Register on November 6, 1908 recounting the biography of George Esterly.

George Esterly was born on an Ulster County farm, New York, in the year 1809. He came of English stock, and farther back of German ancestry. His forebears were of those known in London as “Esterlings,” and whose money was so sound that the name “sterling” was in time given to it. The same good word applies to his character of the subject of this sketch. Mr. Esterly was ambitious and enterprising, and in 1836 he pushed out to the Territory of Wisconsin. There he purchased 1120 acres of very choice land in the county of Walworth [Heart Prairie area] and proceeded to farm it. The difficulty of procuring sufficient help hampered him greatly and when, in 1843, he saw 800 acres of the finest wheat go back into the ground because he could not harvest it, he set out to procure harvesting machinery if possible. Nothing adequate could be found and so he built shops and set his inventive genius to work. A “Header” was soon devised and its action was so satisfactory that he began to manufacture in 1844. In 1855 he began to build his famous hand rake Reaper, and two years later erected well equipped shops at Whitewater. In 1865 he added a very successful Seeder and Cultivator to his output and in 1870 he brought out a self rake Reaper. In 1875 the manufacture of a Twine Binder, which at once met with a great demand. The works at times employed 600 hands. All went well until 1892 when the factory was removed to Minneapolis and the capital increased to $1,950,000. This coming at the beginning of the great panic of 1893-96 was a disastrous move, and a receivership was followed by an entire closing of the Esterly enterprise.

Mr. Esterly was a man of fine public spirit, and of great influence in his city and state. Especially was he interested in questions of currency and finance, and several pamphlets which he issued attracted wide attention. He was married three times; one son and four daughters were born to him, all of who survived when in the year 1895 at the age of 86, he was called to his final rest.”
C.W. Butterfield’s HISTORY OF WALWORTH COUNTY, 1892 gives us a contemporary personal account by George Esterly which is included in Butterfield’s history.

“The following is the account given by Mr. Esterly of his attempts to improve his condition while a farmer of Heart Prairie [Town of La Grange, Walworth County]: “In 1837. Mr. Esterly removed to Heart Prairie and secured over a thousand acres of land, engaging extensively in the cultivation of wheat—as many as 350 acres in a year. He soon ascertained that wheat could not be grown profitably in the far West, if harvested in the ordinary way, and set about inquiring how far the inventive genius of the country had supplanted and superseded labor. Obed Huzzy, of Baltimore, had invented a harvesting machine which was talked about but he ascertained that it required four horses and ten men to cut and bind twenty acres per day, which was not a satisfactory exhibit as a labor saving contrivance. Similar objections applied to other machines that were announced, and some of which he purchased and tried proved total failures involving losses greater than he could afford. He was thus induced, by pressure of necessity, to attempt the invention of something better than any of which he had knowledge, and commenced by experimenting on a style of reaper where the horses were placed behind the cutting apparatus and steered by a tiller, on the principle of steering vessels. He made many fruitless and costly experiments in his barn, which he had converted into a machine shop, but succeeded in producing a machine the first season that would cut successfully ten acres of wheat in a half day. This was in 1844, and in the succeeding year he went to Milwaukee and employed what were called skilled mechanics to build for him five machines of the kind just described, but the result of this was a loss of $1,200, which he was compelled to pay for machines that were only partially finished and of no practical value. The next year, he again converted his barn into a machine shop and began the construction of harvesting machines, which improved so entirely successful that he was induced to engage in the business of manufacturing them for sale, and which has resulted in one of the largest manufactories of the kind in the West. Mr. Esterly received his first patent in 1844, removing permanently to Whitewater in 1857.”
...York State. At the height of 5'8”, a blue eyed, brown haired, 17 year old farmer decided in March of 1865 that he would enlist in Company F of the 193rd New York Infantry. He served as a dispatch rider through the Cumberland Gap, carrying messages between the Union Armies. Ryan was mustered out of service at Harper’s Ferry on January 18, 1866. After the close of the war, he moved from New York to Wisconsin, settling first in the Waukesha area and later moving to Lake Geneva. He became a mason by trade and also engaged in farming.

In 1875 Ryan married Elizabeth Wilson of Lake Geneva. They had three children: Louis James, Joseph and Bessie.

On April 10, 1941 at the age of 93, Ryan died at his home in Elkhorn after suffering for months from ill health caused by a fractured hip. Military services were conducted at the Methodist Church with the Harry Kelly Post of the American Legion assisting. Ryan had been a member of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) veterans’ organization and had been present at the 1938 National GAR Encampment commemorating the 75th anniversary of the Battle of Gettysburg in Gettysburg, Pennsylvania.

By Pat Blackmer