

Hinkleys and Thomases Settled in Community Later Known as Palestine

The year 1836 lent meaning to the old description "land office business."

People who settled southeastern Wisconsin must have bulged the walls of the land office in Milwaukee as they sought their future homes.

Among those eager seekers were two vigorous New Hampshire men, Henry and Ahira Hinkley. With them were Andrew Scofield and Charles Rayness (sometimes spelled Reynous).

This quartet left Milwaukee for Prairieville by ox team Aug. 18, 1836, reached the home of David Orendorf, remained there for two days, then left for the region Sugden, Garton and Coats had designated as Eagle when they were on a previous prospecting tour.

As the four men came down a trail which is now Hy. NNN, they saw a beautiful spring. Farther south was a hill topped with big trees, and still farther south the prairie stretched out like the wings of a soaring eagle.

Always a decisive man, A. R. Hinkley reached for his knife and carved his name on one of the trees in the grove. The Hinkley brothers built a 12 foot by 12 foot cabin a quarter of a mile south of the spring.

One month after the Hinkleys arrived Ebenezer Thomas, with horses, wagon and stock, cut his way down Hy. NNN to land east and south of the Hinkley claim. He built a cabin and settled his family there.

For four years, the Hinkleys and Thomases were the only settlers in what was later to be known as Palestine.

A. R. Hinkley, then 26, had left a sweetheart in New Hampshire, so, after he completed his log cabin, he went back to Lebanon, N. H.

Returned to Cabin in 1838

His sweetheart, Mary Cutler Daniels, came from a well-to-do family who felt that to come to the wilds of Wisconsin — with its Indians and its frontier hardships — was little better than signing a death warrant. The young Hinkley therefore required a year to get consent of his bride and her family. It was 1838 by the time the young couple returned to the log cabin in Palestine, Waukesha county.

Since the Thomases stayed continuously at their location, they always claimed the honor of being the first permanent settlers of the town of Eagle. Thomas built a blacksmith shop in 1837, but where it was located neither records nor traditional history divulge.

In 1840, Oramel and Phoebe Hinkley took up land in section 10.

The first store in Eagle was kept by William Harrison in 1842. This store, later owned by Alfred Galpin, was located in the southeastern corner of the intersection of Hys. NNN, X and 59. No vestige of it exists.

Thomas Trow came to Palestine in 1845 and took up land on the road leading west from the Palestine schoolhouse.

With the arrival of the fifth decade, settlers came in fast. Andrew McCabe took land that is now a way-side site in the kettle moraine on Hy. 67. Charles Hill chose the present Elmer Marty farm. M. F. Brady

selected land southwest of the McCabe holdings. And James Perry, father of William W. Perry who later held the highest office of the Masonic lodge, chose the former William Markham farm.

During the 70 years that A. R. Hinkley lived in Palestine, he was the outstanding man of the region. A versatile man, he built his cobblestone house — on Hy. 59, occupied by Phillip Folts — in 1848. He collected the stones, burnt some of them to get lime for the plaster and passed them through a hole in a board to insure uniformity. He traveled to Pretty Lake for its white sand for the plaster and mortar and went to Waukesha quarries for lime slabs for lintels and slabs for the door steps which still exist.

As a kind of sideline, Hinkley pulled teeth. Seeing a neighbor coming across his furrows, he knew an aching tooth was probably the cause. He would stop his plow, lean the patient up against the plow, take the extractors he always kept in his pocket and remove the offending tooth.

Told of Terrifying Sounds

Hinkley was active in civic, religious and political affairs. He served the public in various school, church and town offices. He was also a member of the Masonic Lodge.

He was a promoter of the proposed Milwaukee and Mississippi railroad, and to hasten its construction, he mortgaged his farm for \$2,000. Although there was a bond given him stating that no interest would be charged on his purchase of stock, in later years, after litigation, he was charged interest at 10 percent for the full amount. Promise had also been made that he and his sons and daughters would be given free transportation on the road as long as they lived. That promise was repudiated several years before they died.

When the railroad came to Eagle, all hope of a town at Palestine vanished. The store was abandoned and in a short time the building was razed. The one remaining institution was the public school.

Many people do not know that the first school building was logs, but this is proved by a pioneer story:

In 1849, an Englishman was walking out from Milwaukee to Melendy's prairie to friends. He wanted to find land for his family. Reaching Palestine just as darkness was coming on, he heard peculiar noises — many of them and from different directions. In his reading about America, he had come across terrifying stories about wolves, how they bayed from various directions, getting closer and closer, finally coming together in their blood thirsty attacks upon their victim.

The traveler was discreet, so, fearing that these noises were those of wolves, and seeing the log schoolhouse at Palestine, decided to stay there overnight and finish his journey the next day.

In later years, when he could laugh over his experiences, he told about the "terrifying sounds" of . . . frogs!

A second school was built in 1854 and a third in 1928.