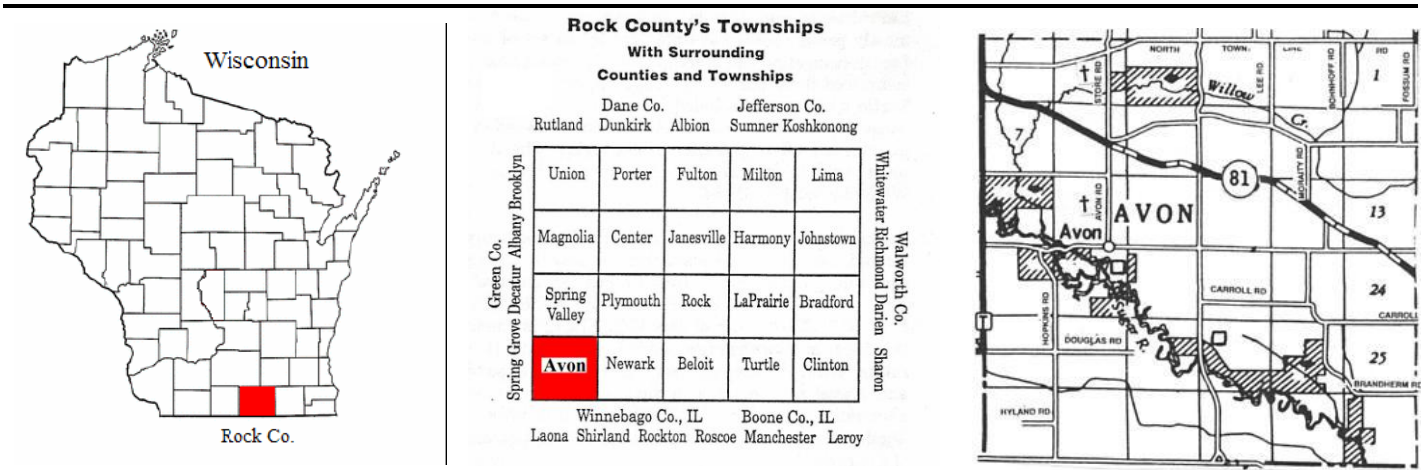


Avon Township Guide

Published by the Rock County Genealogical Society

This guide contains the thirteenth township in a series of twenty township resource guides. It is intended to be of use to those doing genealogical or historical research in Avon Township, Rock County, Wisconsin. Besides being published here, the resource materials collected for each Rock County township will be placed on file in the RCGS Library located at the Wilson King Stone House on the grounds of the Lincoln-Tallman House Restorations. Additions and corrections to this information are welcome and should be sent to the Rock County Genealogical Society, P.O. Box 936, Janesville, WI 53547-936. These additions and corrections will be put on file and added before final publication of the compendium of Rock County Township Guides in the future. These materials will be available and much-used by RCGS research volunteers and individual genealogists and historians. Copyright 2005 RCGS. See more general resources relevant to all Rock County Townships at: http://www.rootsweb.com/~wircgs/rock_twps.html.



Resources for Avon Township, Rock County, Wisconsin

Town of Avon

- Township 1 north, of Range 10 east of 4th Meridian

Physical Features

Place Names of Avon Township

- | Name | Sec.# | Location Notes |
|----------------|--------------------|--|
| • Avon Center | 17 & 20 | Intersection of Co. K & Beloit-Newark Rd |
| • Sugar River | various | Enters Twp. sect. 18 & exits Twp. sect. 36 |
| • Taylor Creek | 6 & 7 | |
| • North Creek | 1, 11, 3, 4, 5 & 7 | Now known as Willow Creek |

History of Avon Township

Avon Township, Rock County, WI

This town – the southwest one of the county – comprises within its limits the original surveyed Township 1 north, of Range 10 east, containing thirty-six sections of land, equivalent to thirty-six square miles of territory. The south line of the town is the boundary line between the State of Illinois and Wisconsin. The west line of the town is a part of the county line between the counties of Green and Rock. North of Avon is the town of Spring Valley; east of it, the town of Newark.¹

This is the least valuable township in the county for agricultural purposes, as there is a great portion of it either timberland or so sandy as to render it comparatively worthless for the raising of many kinds of grain. The soil is a light sandy loam. Along Sugar Creek is a large, fine bottom, capable of producing great quantities of grass and hay.²

Avon is a well-watered and well-timbered township, about one quarter being prairie and the balance burr oak and white oak openings, and rich bottom land along the Sugar River, a small but fine stream running through the south west part of the town. From the bottom lands a large quantity of wild grass is annually cut. The Village of Avon is on sand prairie, a very level, beautiful but sandy prairie, which extends along the Sugar River for many miles. It is near the river where there is a grist mill and saw mill, two stores, blacksmith shop, etc.³

The town of Avon was first organized by an act of the Territorial Legislature February 11, 1847. Previous to this, Avon had been a part of nearby Town of Newark.

The population is principally American; yet in the northeast part of the town, there are a great many Norwegians, who are of the enterprising class and make good citizens.⁴

Here is a listing of some of the early settlers and where they are from, if known, who were living in the Town of Avon before 1860.

John ADAMS from Ohio. Andrew ARMUNDSON born in Norway. James BARNES, L.O. BARR, H. BEALES. Enoch BEALS of Vermont. Wm. C. BEALS, Edwin BREED from New York. Rufus BREED from New York. Thomas BODYCOAT from England, William BURCALOW born in New York. Seymore CHAMBERLAIN, Charles CLARK from New York. John COX born in England, William CRIPPEN, H.W. DIXON. Ole DUSTRUDE born in Norway, Hendrick ENDERSON, Patrick FINNEY. Newell FITCH from New York, Stephan GARDNER from England. William GRIMES from New Hampshire, W.R. HALL born in England, H. HENDRICKSON also known as H.H. SHIRLEY born in Norway. Ira HERSHEY, Gunder HOLVER born in Norway. Cleophus HOLVERSON from Norway, Peter HOLVERSON born in Norway. Joseph HUNTLEY, John HUNTLEY from New York. Inbred INGERBRETSON from Norway, Easton JOHNSON, John KENNADA, Joseph KINNEY Jr. Gens KNUDSON born in Norway, Nels LOFTHUS born in Norway. Ephraim MILLER from Ohio, Frederick NASH born in England. J. NELSON born in Norway, Mr. NORTHROP, A.N. Randall from New York, Alvin RANDALL. Lars SIMONSON from Norway, Ole STORDOCK born in Norway.

¹ History of Rock County, Western Historical Co., Chicago, 1879, p502

² Combination Atlas Map of Rock County, Everts, Baskin and Stewart, Chicago, IL, 1873, p71

³ History of Rock County & Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society & Mechanics' Institute, Wm. Doty & Bros. Printers, 1856, p.44

⁴ Combination Atlas Map of Rock County, Everts, Baskin and Stewart, Chicago, IL, 1873, p71

Calvin TAYLOR from Vermont, W.F. THOMPSON, Joseph WATSON, and John WATSON from New York.

Biography - A.N. Randall

The chairman of the Avon Supervisors in 1855 was A. N. RANDALL. He was born in Erie County, New York in 1830, and was reared on the family farm. He attended Brockport Collegiate Institute. In 1847 he came to Wisconsin and located in the town of Avon, where the next year, he bought eighty acres of land, later adding another 105 acres. He engaged in cultivation of his land during the summers, and taught school winters until the breaking out of the Civil war. He enlisted in Company G, 13th Wis. V.I., and served until Feb. 1, 1865. While on duty in Nashville, he became acquainted with Miss Emma C. LOOFBOUROW, daughter of Judge WADE and Nancy LOOFBOUROW of Lafayette County, Ohio. They were married on March 27, 1865.

A.N. RANDALL was a distinguished representative of the legal profession at Brodhead, in Green County and his years of experience and practical knowledge of men and business, backed by an upright character, give weight to his legal lore in the minds of both judge and jury. He was admitted to the Bar in 1869, and for over thirty years, devoted himself to the profession.

For five years, he served on the County Board. In 1882 and 1883 he served a term in the State Senate.⁵

Biography - Wm. Grimes

William GRIMES served as treasurer of the Avon Township in 1855. He was one of the pioneers of Avon Township, born in Keene, New Hampshire in 1815. In 1837, at the age of 22, he came to Wisconsin and located in Beloit, which at that time was not named, but was simply called the "mouth of Turtle Creek". He started by stage from the East with a colony that came as far as Chicago, which then was a small place with its streets partly built on stilts because of the mire. The group followed an Indian trail to the present site of Beloit, which was marked by five log shanties and Janesville by one double log house occupied by John P. DIXON and Charles STEVENS.

He took up a claim in Avon, but did not move there until 1846. He became familiar with the Indians and learned to converse with them. They called him "the good little white man".

He was a delegate to the first convention to nominate candidates to the territorial legislature, the meeting being held in a grove between Beloit and Janesville. E.V. WHITING presided. Mr. GRIMES was also a member of the first jury ever drawn in the county.

He married Esther CROSBY, whose parents were also pioneers in Avon. Four generations of the GRIMES family lived on the old homestead.⁶

⁵ Commemorative Biographical Record of the Counties of Rock, Green, Grant, Iowa and LaFayette Wisconsin, Chicago: J.H. Beers & Co. 1901, page 768

⁶ Town of Avon Formed in February 1847, Brodhead Independent Register, Brodhead, WI, 1776-1976 Bicentennial Edition, Thursday December 9, 1976.

Early Mail Service

Star Route Mail Service

Many Avon citizens remembered when the Star Route mail service from Avon to Brodhead started in about 1887. James LANE was the first carrier and died a few months after he took over the service. His wife, Clara BRACE LANE, took over and continued this way until May 15, 1901, when she moved to Brodhead and was appointed carrier on the Rural Free Delivery. During these first years she would bring mail from Brodhead to the store where Mrs. TAYLOR, mother of the late David TAYLOR, Brodhead, would distribute it as folks called for it. Mrs. LANE's route was 25 miles, she was in the service for 21 years and only missed two trips in that time. She was killed by accident when the "kingbolt" broke and the front axle with the wheels broke loose from the old narrow mail wagon. This was January 1, 1908. Her daughter Lola LANE was substitute for a while then Marion CONDON delivered the mail until the route was taken over by Ben THOSTENSON.⁷

Avon Anecdote

Rattlesnake in Avon??

(source: Orfordville Journal, Wednesday May 27, 1936, page 1, column 4)

"Yup! Ben BECK knows the voice of a rattler now. Recently while working on a telephone repair job down in Avon he heard a peculiar noise. Not expecting a rattler for company he was somewhat surprised when he caught a glimpse of the intruder and made a quick move to get away from the snake and the snake made a jump at the same time and landed where Ben had been standing a second before.

Ben made for the car to get a shovel to kill the snake, but when Ben came back the unwelcome visitor had taken French leave. Ben says he does not like rattle snakes as playthings."

Description of Avon Township

By Audrey DODSON, Avon Town Clerk, 1976

Avon Township is still mostly a rural agricultural community with some residential homes scattered throughout. The Village of Avon remains a quiet pleasant village with a few newer homes built there. There are no stores in the Village of Avon at the present time. Many of the farms have changed ownership in the last few years, some being split into smaller parcels as more and more people desire for a place to live and bring up their families in the peace and quiet of country living.

The neat and well kept residential homes built throughout the township are a real asset to the community.

The scenic Sugar River winds through the township providing many hours of pleasure for area fishermen. The surrounding hills provide scenic views for the large Sugar River Valley. The well kept area farms are evidence of more and more excellent conservation practices that have become necessary in recent years as farming costs continue to rise at a rapid pace and more and more land is being farmed on a rotation basis. The beautiful valley provides many acres of corn and soybeans for harvest.

⁷ Town of Avon Formed in February 1847, Brodhead Independent Register, Brodhead, WI, 1776-1976 Bicentennial Edition, Thursday December 9, 1976.

Churches

Today, there is one active church in the town of Avon:

- **The Avon Community Church**, located in Section 15.

Many years ago Avon Township had two churches:

- **The Advent Church** located in the village of Avon Center. The Advent Church eventually dwindled and the building was sold, used as a barn and was torn down about 1918.
- **The Baptist Church** located in the village of Avon Center and was sold and used as a hall. It is now the building currently used by the Avon Community Church.

Cemeteries

There are two cemeteries in the town of Avon.

- **Northrop Cemetery** in Section 5, on Townline Road. Earliest burials from the 1840's.
- **Avon Cemetery** in Section 17, on Avon Store Road, with burials from the 1840's. The original plat to the cemetery was destroyed by fire, so for several years no records were kept.

Funeral Homes

There are no funeral homes in the Town of Avon. Two nearby funeral homes are:

- **Newcomer-Silverthorn Funeral Home**, Orfordville, WI
- **D.L. Newcomer Funeral Home**, Brodhead, WI

Schools

In 1888 there were 8 school houses and four joint districts. The BARR School was the oldest, it dated back to 1850. In early years, wages for teachers in country schools were \$2.00 a week and board. The teacher boarded amongst the homes that sent children to school.

The school houses used to be the gathering places for amusements and sometimes funerals were held from them. Students from Avon Township now attend Brodhead and Orfordville schools.⁸

School Names

- Pioneer School (later, known as Pioneer-Engen School) – Sec. 1
- Howard School – Sec. 8
- Barr School – Sec. 13, the oldest, dating back to 1850.
- Avon School – Sec. 17

⁸ Town of Avon Formed in February 1847, Brodhead Independent Register, Brodhead, WI, 1776-1976 Bicentennial Edition, Thursday December 9, 1976.

- Avon Center School – Sec. 22
- Stokes School – Sec. 26
- Adams School – Sec. 29
- Fairview School – Sec. 34

Drainage Canal

Avon Drainage Canal dug 1907-1908. The SW corner of Avon twp is bisected by the Sugar River. Several Hundred acres of land on both sides of the river were normally too wet to be farmed. Farmers who owned this land formed a drainage district to dig a drainage canal. The cost of the project was paid for through assessments on the township tax bills.

In the fall of 1907 a steam powered excavator owned by a Mr. JOHNSON began the task. Coal to operate the machine was hauled from Brodhead by horses and wagon. At the site, the coal was loaded onto a stone boat (a low platform on skids) and pulled to the machine by a yoke of oxen (Joe & Tig). Oxen are capable of negotiating soft soil where horses would flounder.

The canal enabled farmers to lay perpendicular tile lines to the canal to drain their land. The project was so successful, more canals were dug on both sides and parallel to the river. The machine left a dyke of dirt on each side and these dykes served to contain the river in times of high water. Actually, water backed up into the canals from their point of entry to the river. This served as reservoirs to handle the water.

The crew of 8 persons who operated the machine included locals, Herb HAWKINS and Lee & Lou JONES. The experience which the JONES brothers gained while operating the excavator led to their later owning a steam engine and threshing machine for custom work. The canals turned worthless swamp into productive farm land.⁹

Railroad

At one time there were two stores, a cheese factory, shoe shop, tailor shop, blacksmith shop, pump factory, two churches, a school, a sawmill, and a flour mill. The village was several times its present size and had good prospects for further development when plans were made for a railroad to be known as the Sugar River Valley Railroad. This line was to connect at the old Town of Decatur in Green County and Avon with a line leading to Chicago.

The project developed to a point where grading of the road was completed. Remains of this grading are still visible a short distance east and north from the village. But while this project was still in its incomplete stage the railroad that is now known as the Chicago Milwaukee, St. Paul and Pacific was extended from Janesville west through Hanover and Orfordville into Green County and the Sugar River Valley Company collapsed, leaving Avon without a railroad. This no doubt accounts for its gradual decline to its present status.¹⁰

⁹ Sharing Our History, Avon Township History & Pioneers, Luther Valley Historical Society, by Kay Demrow, 2002, page 13.

¹⁰ Town of Avon Formed in February 1847, Brodhead Independent Register, Brodhead, WI, 1776-1976 Bicentennial Edition, Thursday December 9, 1976.

Newspapers

In the 1850's there was a Norwegian newspaper "**The Emigranten**" which was published in nearby Plymouth Township which served the area.

There are no newspapers currently published in the Town of Avon. Newspapers which serve the area are:

- **The Janesville Gazette**
- **The Beloit Daily News**
- **The Orfordville Journal**
- **Brodhead Independent Register.**

Resources for Avon Township

- *Rock County Wisconsin*, William F. Brown, 1908, (RCHS/RCGS Library)
- *Rock County Wisconsin*, Western Historical Company, Chicago, IL. 1879. (RCHS/RCGS Library)
- *History of Rock County: Transactions of the Rock County Agricultural Society and Mechanics Institute*, Wm. Doty and Brother. 1856. (Hedberg Public Library)

The information compiled here was found in resources from the Luther Valley Historical Society, Rock County Genealogical Society and the Hedberg Public Library.

- **Luther Valley Historical Society**, 158 Depot St., P.O. Box 253, Footville, WI 53537-0253
- **Hedberg Public Library**, 316 South Main Street, Janesville, WI 53545

Compiled by Lois James