

Clinton Township Guide

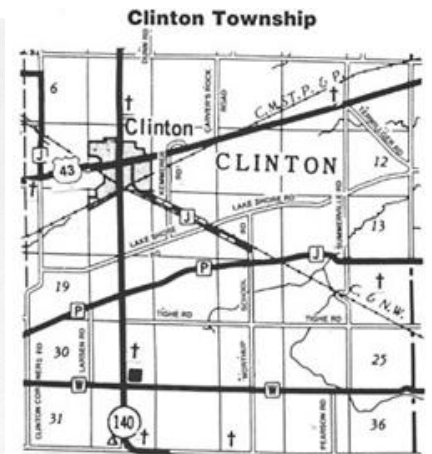
Published by the Rock County Genealogical Society

This guide contains the fifth township in a series of twenty township resource guides. It is intended to be of use to those doing genealogical or historical research in Clinton 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 711, Janesville, WI 53547. 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.



**Rock County's Townships
With Surrounding
Counties and Townships**

	Dane Co.		Jefferson Co.		
	Rutland	Dunkirk	Albion	Sumner	Koshkonong
Green Co. Spring Grove Decatur Albany Brooklyn	Union	Porter	Fulton	Milton	Lima
	Magnolia	Center	Janesville	Harmony	Johnstown
	Spring Valley	Plymouth	Rock	LaPrairie	Bradford
	Avon	Newark	Beloit	Turtle	Clinton
	Winnebago Co., IL		Boone Co., IL		
	Laona	Shirland	Rockton	Roscoe	Manchester
			Whitewater Richmond Darien Sharon		
			Walworth Co.		



Resources for Clinton Township, Rock County, Wisconsin

Town of Clinton

- Town I Range 14 E

Physical Features

- Little Turtle Creek
- Dry Creek
- Spring Brook
- Jefferson Prairie

Place Names of Clinton Township

- Clinton (Clinton Junction)
- Clinton Corners
- Summerville no longer exists as a community. Originally, it was in sections 1 and 2, where Summerville Road, County “X”, and Terwilliger Roads intersect today. It was named for the New York home of one of the first settlers. The post office closed in 1857.
- Jefferson Prairie is the name given to the prairie by the five men who first staked claim to land there calling themselves the “Jefferson Prairie Company,” after their home county in New York. It was the name later used by the community of Norwegian settlers who settled the prairie area south of the present village of Clinton.

History of Clinton Township

A history of Clinton Township and the Village of Clinton has been recorded in the early official Rock County Histories of 1879, 1889, and 1908. Through the years other publications, including those celebrating the centennial and sesquicentennial of the area, as well as scrapbooks, numerous newspaper articles, and other published records have also recorded this history. These resources include wonderful recollections of the area by many residents. While reviewing many of those resources, we found that dates and “memories” of events often varied—sometimes a little and sometimes a great deal. We will relate the traditional history, but encourage researchers to read those informal sources for a more personal view of the history of both the township and the village.

In the *1873 Combination Atlas Map of Rock County*, Everts, Baskin, and Stewart describe Clinton Township as “one of the finest farming sections in the county, a large proportion of it being prairie land of great fertility. There is a great abundance of timber in the southern portion of the town for fuel, fencing, and building requirements. The town is also well watered by living streams.”

On April 9, 1837, five men from Jefferson County, New York, staked a claim to land in the name of their “Jefferson Prairie Company.” These five men, Charles Tuttle, Dr. Dennis Mills, Milton S. Warner, and William S. Murray became the first settlers in Clinton Township. According to the *1908 History of Rock County*, the first structure was made of poles and blankets, with a brush heap for a roof, and a wagon box for the floor. The first meals were cooked over a log fire. These “residents” then explored the surrounding prairie and timberlands. Next, they constructed a 12 x 16 foot house. Mr. Tuttle went to Rockford for grain, oxen, and a plow that enabled them to plant corn, potatoes, oats, buckwheat, turnips, etc.

Other settlers joined them and staked claims paying \$1.25 an acre or less. There soon was a settlement simply called Clinton Corners at what is now the intersection of County Highways “X” and “J.” Clinton was a popular name for new settlements in the Northwest Territory, because Governor DeWitt Clinton of New York was instrumental in the construction of the Erie Canal, which became a waterway enabling settlers to move west. On February 17, 1842, the Wisconsin Territorial Legislature authorized the organization of Clinton Township.

The original town contained portions of today's Turtle and LaPrairie Townships. The first town meeting was held at the home of Charles Tuttle in April of 1842. The first wedding was the marriage of Ezekiel Brownell and Adelina Pratt and the first baby born was a daughter to Mrs. S. E. Downer in 1838. 1843 found Eliza Baker teaching twenty students in the first school. During that same year post offices were established for Clinton Corners and nearby Summerville. Stephen Perley was postmaster in Clinton Corners. The Clinton Corners Cemetery was established and the first known burial was that of Henry Baldwin in 1845. By the 1850's Clinton Corners had a general store, hotel, blacksmith shop, and churches. An early settler, L. P. Harvey, ran a general store in Clinton Corners in 1847 and later, in 1862, became the governor of Wisconsin. By 1855, the population of the township had grown to 1,359.

Then the railroads came. In 1856 when two railroads, the Racine and Mississippi and the Chicago and Fond du Lac built intersecting railroad lines just one mile to the east, everything changed. A new town sprang up at the intersection of these railroads and Clinton Corners moved seemingly overnight to Clinton, or as it was known then, Clinton Junction. The Baptist church was even moved to the new location on skids pulled by teams of oxen. In 1857 the Postal Department changed the name of Clinton to Ogden (in honor of the president of the Chicago and Fond du Lac Railroad) and established another post office by the name of Clinton in Sheboygan County. However, the people would not accept that change and the post office department finally relented and it became Clinton once again in 1864.

The Village of Clinton was incorporated, and elections held in 1882. Clinton had a newspaper as early as April 6, 1861, when the *Clinton Enterprise* was first published. Several other newspapers have served Clinton over the years, with today's "Clinton Topper" being a weekly paper. Even though farming—dairy, grain, and tobacco—was the main industry of the township, manufacturing came with the railroads. Clinton had the Wallis Carriage Company, the Clinton Steam Flouring Mill, the Clinton Truck Factory, and the Clinton Junction Cigar Works. The cigar factory was producing 60,000 cigars a month in 1879. A grocery store and other shops, hotels, and liverys lined the main street, which sported boardwalks. Elleck Bruce established a funeral home in 1873. After a series of disastrous fires, a fire department was organized in 1896. The records of the department have been lost or destroyed so it is hard to establish its history. According to the *Rock County Banner*, a most exciting event occurred on January 14, 1912. Clinton experienced an earthquake tremor that even swayed the gaslights!

One of the oldest homes, if not the oldest, in the area that continues to be occupied today is the "Cobblestone House" on Milwaukee Road. It is Greek Revival in style and was originally built by Alonzo Richardson. It is on the historic register.

People of many nationalities came to Clinton Township. In the 1850's Irish immigrants settled in the southeast corner of the township. You will find the names of Conry, Mullooly, Gibbons, Laughran, and Lannon on the markers in St. Catherine's Catholic Cemetery. The Norwegian immigrants came as early as 1838 under the leadership of Ole Knudson Nattestad (Natesta) and settled the prairie to the south of the present village. This settlement, along with the one at Luther Valley, is the first Norwegian settlements in Wisconsin. By 1860 there were 175

Norwegian families living in the area. A Wisconsin Historical Marker south of Clinton marks the settlement and gives its history. A survey of the 1850 census finds Larson, Hanson, Erickson, Knutson, and Gunderson among many other Norwegian names. The Germans—Stauch, Ballunger, Vendels, Klingbeil---and Danes—Thompson, Jensen, Sorensen--- arrived next, along with many more from the New England area who were primarily of English and Scotch descent—Baker, Case, Wales, Dickens. The Dutch were attracted to the rich farming area and came in the 1930's, making a reverse migration from South Dakota to escape the dust bowl region. The 1987 Sesquicentennial Book, *The History of Clinton*, notes that by 1987 the township could boast of many century farms and families.

When researching Clinton Township, it may be necessary to also check Walworth County resources. The residents of the far eastern sections of the township were often socially and economically tied to the villages of Sharon and Darien in Walworth County. They did their shopping there and in some cases attended school and church in Sharon Township. They sometimes filed legal documents in Walworth County, and were buried there. It is also important to look in the northern sections of Boone County, Illinois, and at Boone County records because the state line between Wisconsin and Illinois was not finalized in those formative years.

Information for this history of the township was taken from the following sources:

1. *Combination Atlas Map of Rock County*. 1873.
2. *Rock County Portrait and Bibliography Album*, 1889.
3. *Clinton Bicentennial*, 1976. Edited by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Sommers and Helen Newhouse.
4. *History of Rock County*, 1908.
5. *History of Clinton, Wisconsin. 150 Years (a Sesquicentennial Edition.)* Curtis Media Corporation. 1987.
6. *Ancient History of Clinton, Wisconsin*. (with index) R. W. Cheever. 1898.

Clinton Cemeteries

- Summerville Cemetery is located along Co. "X" west of Summerville Rd. It is behind a school house that is now a private residence. Some of the burials have been moved to Clinton Cemetery.
- Clinton Cemetery (village) is located on Highway 140, north of Clinton. A cemetery transcription can be found at the RCHS Archives. It began in 1860.
- Clinton Corners Cemetery is along Co. "X" to the west of Clinton Corners Rd. (Co. "J"). It had its beginnings in the 1840's with the last burial in the 1920's. It is the resting place for early Clinton area pioneers. There is a transcription at the RCHS Archives. The first burial was Henry Baldwin in 1845.
- St. Catherine's Catholic Cemetery is south off of Co. "J," and east of Summerville Road. The cemetery was established in 1854 and is associated with St. Catherine's Catholic Church in Sharon, Walworth Co., WI. Many of the township's early Irish settlers are buried here. There is a transcription at the RCHS Archives.
- A nameless cemetery is located along Highway 140 south of Clinton in Sec. 29.
- Jefferson Prairie Cemetery is along Highway 140 just south of Clinton at State Line Road. It was established in 1858.
- East Jefferson Prairie/East Bergen Cemetery is north of State Line Road, and west of Northrup School Road. It was established in 1848.

In adjoining Sharon Township, Walworth County, are cemeteries where some Clinton Township residents have been buried. These include:

- South Grove Cemetery, which is along Salt Box Road south of old Co "B."
- North Sharon Cemetery, located along Lakeshore Road at the junction of Co. "C."
- Oakwood Cemetery, which is along Cemetery Road North of Sharon, and west of Co "C." It was established in 1886.

Funeral Homes

- Schoenfeld Funeral Home is located at 504 Milwaukee Rd., and is the only funeral home currently operating in Clinton. There are no records further back than 1975.

Churches

- The First Congregational Church. It was established in 1858 and later merged with the United Methodist Church to form the Presbyterian Church. See below.
- The Pella Lutheran Church had its beginnings in Bradford Township in 1901. A new church was built in Clinton in 1930. It is located at 422 Church St.
- The United Methodist Church was organized in 1844 and a church was built in 1857. It merged with the First Congregational Church to form the Presbyterian Church during WWI, and then reorganized in the early 1920's. It is located at 402 Church St.
- Christ Evangelical Lutheran was organized in 1882. For a time (late 1800's) a parochial school was connected with the church. A new church was built in 1937. It is located at 300 High St.
- Emmanuel Reformed Church formally organized in 1938. The congregation met in the Methodist Church until 1950 when a church was built. It is located at 319 East St.
- St Stephens Catholic Church became a reality in 1973. It is an outgrowth of St. Catherine's in Sharon. It is located at 716 Shu Lar Lane.
- The First Presbyterian Church came into existence in 1919 when the Methodist and Congregational Churches merged. It is located at 312 Church St.
- The First Baptist Church is said to be the second Baptist church in the Wisconsin Territory and was organized in 1839. The church was built at Clinton Corners and was later moved to Clinton. The present church was built in 1867 with many improvements since. It is located at 309 Allen St.
- Clinton Evangelical Free Church is located at 313 Mill St.
- Jefferson Prairie Lutheran Church was organized in 1844 by the Norwegian community, which had settled Jefferson Prairie. The first church was built in 1849. The congregation split for a time, but reunited in 1892. A new building was built in 1944. The church address is 23184 Bergen Rd, Poplar Grove, IL
- St. Catherine's Church is located in Sharon, Walworth County, WI. It began as a mission church in 1846 and was in several locations over the years. At one time it was at the entrance to the drive to the present day St. Catherine's Cemetery on County "J." A new brick church was built in Sharon in 1912.

Clinton Township Schools

Several of the rural schools of Clinton Township were formed jointly with other townships because a school was to be located within “appropriate walking distance.”. As those schools closed, they became part of the present day K – 12 Clinton Community School District. The first school was the 1843 school after the township organized. A larger school was built in 1863 and the first brick building in 1893. As Clinton has grown and changed so have the school facilities. The RCHS Archives has photos of several of the village and rural schools and each rural school is pictured in the Clinton Bicentennial Booklet listed in the resources section.

- Jefferson Prairie was located along Highway 140, south of the Village of Clinton in section 29. It served children from 1866 -1953.
- Northrup was a joint school with Sharon Township in Walworth County and is located along Northrup School Road in section 22.
- Hofto was located along Northrup School Road in section 34, (aka Little Hofto.)
- Summerville was a joint school with Bradford Township along County “X” in section 2.
- Clinton Corners (aka West Clinton) was a joint school with Turtle Township. It opened in 1848 and closed in 1952. It was located along County “X” in section 7.
- Conley was a joint school with Sharon Township in Walworth Co and established in 1871 (1864) and closed in 1955. After it was closed it was moved to the Mullooley farm and continues to be a private residence. It was originally in section 13, County Line Road at County “J.”
- Salt Box School was along Lakeshore Road just inside Walworth County. In the early years, children from nearby eastern Clinton Township attended this school. It is now private residence. It was called Salt Box School because of its resemblance to a salt box.
- Maple Grove was a joint school with Bradford Township. It closed in 1949.
- Murray was a school from 1844 to 1955.

Newspapers

Newspapers in Clinton Township and the village have come and gone over the years, because the newspaper business was quite precarious. Today, there is a weekly paper:

- *The Clinton Topper*. The *Sharon Reporter* and the *Beloit Daily News* also carry news of the area.

Libraries, Genealogy and Historical Societies, Resource Persons

The following have resources in their collections about Clinton Township and the village of Clinton:

- Hedberg Public Library, 316 S. Main St., Janesville, WI 63545
- Clinton Public Library, 214 Mill Street, Clinton, WI 53525
- Rock County Genealogical Society Library/Rock County Historical Society Archives, corner of Mineral Point Ave. and N. Jackson St., Janesville, WI
- Wisconsin Historical Society, 816 State Street, Madison, WI 53706
- Beloit Public Library, 409 Pleasant Street, Beloit, WI 53511

- Clinton Historical Society is in the process of becoming active again. Contact Joyce Splan at 362-5063 or Phyllis Brandl at 676-4960. They are currently serving as co-presidents of the organization. The society has artifacts and written material on the history of the Clinton area.
- Bingham Library, Sharon, Wisconsin and the Darien Public Library, Darien, Wisconsin have information important to individuals researching the eastern part of Clinton township.

Shirley Sisk has information on many Clinton Township residents who were also associated with Darien and Sharon Townships. She can be reached by email at sis@pensys.com.

Resources for Information on Clinton Township

Wisconsin State Historical Society

- Clinton, Wisconsin telephone directories from 1965 to present. The phone book was incorporated into Beloit's and later Janesville's beginning in 1989.
- First Baptist Church (Clinton, Wisconsin) records for 1899 and 1900.
- Microfilm of the following newspapers (some titles have years and issues missing):
 - *Rock County Banner* (1888-1925--some years missing)
 - *Clinton Herald (Rock County Republican)* (1875-1881, 1882-1907 also to 1942 (Vol. 1-35)
 - *Clinton Times-Observer* (1923-1941)
 - *Clinton Topper* (1938 forward)
 - *Weekly Witness* (1893-1894)
 - *Sharon Inquirer* (1873-1878)
 - *Sharon Mirror* (1869 only)
 - *Sharon Reporter* (1878 forward)

Beloit Public Library

- Beloit newspapers 1848 forward on microfilm.

Bingham Library, Sharon, WI

- Houses bound copies of the *Sharon Reporter* (1878 to date)

Clinton Public Library

- Newspapers:
 - *The Clinton Herald* – bound copies (Dec 1895 – Nov 1896)
 - *Clinton Times Observer* – bound copies (1923 – 1929)
 - *Clinton Topper* – (1942, 1955 – 2004).
- *Souvenir Program. Community History Notes for Clinton Wisconsin 125th anniversary 1837-1962.*
- *135 Years on the Prairie – History of Jefferson Prairie Lutheran Church, 1979.*
- *Clinton Bicentennial, 1976.* Edited by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Sommers and Helen Newhouse.

Rock County Genealogical and Historical Society Library/Archives

- *Combination Atlas Map of Rock County. 1873.* (Lithographs include Clinton Carriage Works, residences, Winkley Nursery and other businesses.). Everts, Baskin, and Stewart.
- School Records: Annual reports, census, clerk record books, treasurer's records, Teacher records, attendance reports for several Clinton township rural schools (Jefferson Prairie, Summerville, Clinton Corners, Conley, Maple Grove, Hofto, Murray, Northrup) and the Clinton Community School District. Years and types of records and materials vary by school.
- *Tract Index of Farm Lands for Clinton Township 1835-1947.* Rock Title and Abstract Service 1947.
- Historic Sites Survey for Rock County includes structures in Clinton (village) and the township.
- Postcard Collection: Township and village photo postcard images.
- CD (Compact disk) containing original plat of Clinton Corners Cemetery and lithograph of Clinton 1884. Clinton Historical Society, 2006. *Souvenir Book of Clinton Fall Festival: Future Farmers Fair Honoring State Centennial*, September, 1948.
- *Clinton Bicentennial, 1976.* Edited by Mr. and Mrs. Edwin Sommers and Helen Newhouse.
- *Ancient History of Clinton, Wisconsin.* (with index) R. W. Cheever. 1898.
- Files on: Clinton Junction, Village of Clinton (history, churches, and businesses/Industry), Summerville, Jefferson Prairie, Clinton Township and village schools, Norwegians in Rock County, records for St. Catherine's, Clinton Corners, and Clinton (village) cemeteries, and the Historic Sites Survey.
- *The Baker and Case Families of Rock County Wisconsin.* Robert E. Ash. Rockford, Illinois.
- *Rural School Histories.* Clinton Corners School. Mildred Rye. 1985
- *Some Facts for the People of Clinton, Wisconsin.* (regarding the James Benedict Family) Lewis Benedict. 1868.
- *History of Clinton and Its Early Pioneers.* Bell Barker. (Scrapbook)
- *Souvenir Program. Community History Notes for Clinton Wisconsin 125th Anniversary 1837-1962.*
- Photo Collection and Postcard Collection: Clinton Township Schools, historic sites, Cobblestone House and family of Samuel Jones, Village of Clinton (street scenes), Reeder-Martin Collection (family photos)
- *Diary of Holmes Hammond 1881-1894.* (3-ring notebook)
- Clinton Schools Scrapbooks 1924-961.
- *East of Beloit: a Guide.* Daniel Hartung. 1983.
- *History of Clinton, Wisconsin. 150 Years (a Sesquicentennial Edition.)* Curtis Media Corporation. 1987.
- *In Search of the Trail and Destination of Ole Knutson Nattestad.* Video, 1997.
- *Rock County Directories.* Rural population (1857-1919) and villages (1891-1919)
- *Main Street on the Middle Border.* Lewis Atherton.

- *The California Letters of Knute B. Duxstad 1852 -1854.* Letters from the gold fields of California to Duxstad's parents at Jefferson Prairie.
- Genealogy History of Immigrants to Jefferson Prairie (Title in Norwegian)
- *Brudstykker of Normanden's Historie I Rock Co. Wi. Og Narmesteomegn 1905 – 1916.*
- *Jefferson Prairie Evangelical Lutheran Church 100 Years.* Rev. O. M. Skindrud.

Compiled by Kay and Tony Briski