

Henry Francis



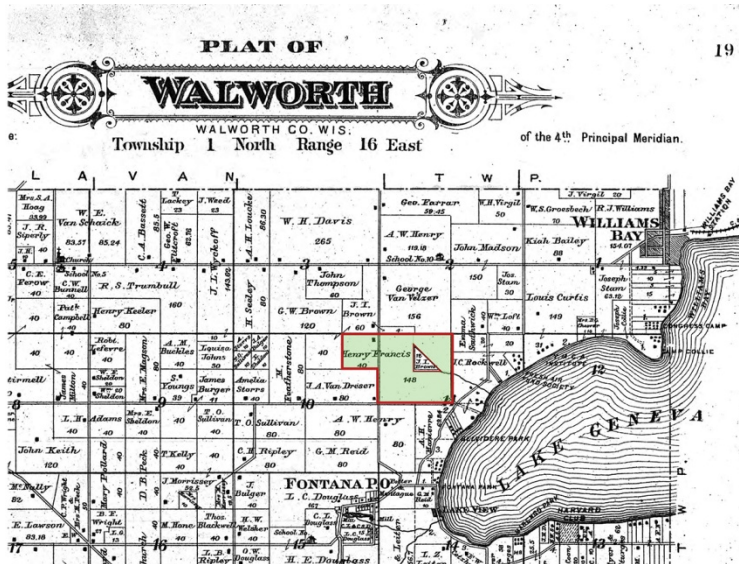
Mr. and Mrs. Henry Francis

A highly respected citizen of Williams Bay, who, although an American by adoption only, has had the interest of Walworth County at heart for over a half century, is Henry Francis, a man who has won success in life because he had been persistent and never permitted obstacles to thwart him in his course when once he knew he was right. He came here with no capital and, liking the country and having faith in its future, he cast his lot with the people of this locality; they soon began to admire him for his good habits and thrifty ways and he has enjoyed their esteem and good will all the while, and thus he and they have been benefited by his long residence here.

Mr. Francis was born at Weststour, Dorsetshire, England, August 9, 1836. He is the son of Henry Francis, Sr. and Patience Francis.

The subject lived in his native land until he was about twenty-one years old, then emigrated to America in the spring of 1857, and after a very stormy voyage of forty-two days, landed at Quebec, Canada. But he did not remain there, having come on to Chicago, where he spent some six weeks, then came to Walworth County to work in the harvest fields, and here he has remained ever since. He did his work so well in the harvest fields that his employer engaged him by the year. A few weeks afterwards

his employer was killed by a threshing machine, and through accepting the advice of the administrator of the estate not to file a claim for his services, Mr. Francis lost all his earnings. He engaged to another man by the year, with whom he remained three years, during which he left nearly all his wages with his employer, who took advantage of the young Englishman and would not pay him, so he lost all. In the meantime during the Civil War he was drafted, although he was still a British subject and had no vote. He was unable to get redress, so his wife borrowed three hundred dollars from Lavalette Douglass and secured a substitute. He then went to work in Douglas' mills, where he remained for eighteen years, losing only six days' time during that period and he often worked overtime. He thus paid back what he had borrowed and saved enough of his earnings to buy a farm



Plat map showing location of the Henry Francis Farm

in 1877, in section 10 and 11 in Walworth Township, consisting of one hundred and eighty-eight acres. There he remained until 1891, when he gave up farming and built a home in Williams Bay. He sold his farm in 1909. He had been very successful as a general farmer and stock raiser, and by his thrift, economy and honest dealings accumulated a competency.

Mr. Francis has taken an interest in local public affairs, and he has served very acceptably a number of times on the board of Supervisors of Walworth Township.

Mr. Francis was married in 1859 to Sarah A. Holmes, daughter of William and Anna

(Mitchell) Holmes. She was born in Lincolnshire, England, and came to this country when fifteen years old, with her parents, who located in Walworth township, near the head of Geneva Lake, where Fontana is now located. The family settled there in 1855, and in that vicinity her parents spent most of their lives after that.

Five children have been born to Mr. and Mrs. Francis, namely: William, who lives along the shore about two miles west of Lake Geneva, married Carrie Davis, and they have two children, Earl and Herbert; Charles, a physician and the first doctor at Williams Bay, married Hettie Southwick, and his death occurred in June 1908; Lavalette and Lafayette, twins, were next in order; Lavalette grew up and married Jennie Southwick and farmed near the Observatory until his death, December 19, 1911; Lafayette, who lives at Beloit, married Maude Dalton, and they have two children, Ruth and Harry; Lafayette is employed in the factory of Fairbanks, Morse and Company. Sarah Jane, the subject's youngest child, died when one year old.

The record of Henry Francis is an interesting one it may be studied with profit by the discouraged young man, for it shows that one can succeed in the face of all obstacles. When seventeen years old he left home and went to the island of Alderney, where he worked on government works, building a breakwater three-fourths of a mile out into the English Channel, and building fortifications also. He crossed to Plymouth, England, from there and took ship for America. He had little opportunity to secure education, for his father died when he was a baby and his mother has a hard time to get

along, and he was thrown upon his own resources early in life, being put to work picking up potatoes in potato-digging time when quite small. But notwithstanding his long life of hard work, he is remarkably well preserved, and his spirit has never been broken, He enjoys a good joke and is a man of genial nature, obliging, honest and seems to possess youthful vigor, although now past seventy-five years of age.

(Article and photo from: *History of Walworth County, Wisconsin*, by Albert Clayton Beckwith, 1912, page 944-945)

Editor's Note: Henry Francis continued to live in Williams Bay until his death in 1917. Sarah Francis died in 1920. Mr. and Mrs. Francis and their daughter, Sarah Jane, are buried at East Delavan Union Cemetery.

