

## History of Hokah

The site of Hokah was, at its founding, an Indian village. The name of Hokah is derived from their leader, Chief Wecheschatope Hokah. The English translation is Garfish.

Detailed accounts of Edward Thompson finding this site and bringing his family here in October of 1851 have been written in other histories. Edward Thompson erected a sawmill in 1852, a flour mill in 1853, and in 1866 a dam across the Root River which furnished power for three flour mills and some cooper shops.

As early as 1854 Edward Thompson began working on a project to build a railroad through the Root River Valley. The Southern Minnesota Railroad began operations at Hokah in 1866. As a result, Hokah's population grew from 100 to nearly 1,500 but a census in 1875 counted 1,023 residents. Water power for the railroad shops which were located at the present junction of Highways 16 and 44 was furnished by a wooden flume which ran from the floodgates of Lake Como. In June of 1880, when the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul secured possession of the Southern Minnesota the shops were razed, leaving several hundred without employment. Most of them moved away and the loss of this business had its effect on the flour mills and cooper shops which closed one by one.

Hokah's first telephone line, built in 1902, by businessmen, extended from the heart of town to the depot. In 1904 a switchboard was purchased replacing a system of call bells in the Hoffman Hardware. On June 18, 1906, the Peoples Telephone Company was formed.

In 1917, the first electric lights were furnished by Hoffman and Ender using water power. A cement flume carried the water from the floodgate area to the flour mill that, erected in 1914, was on the site of the former Weber mill. Power was furnished from 7 pm. to midnight. a 20 horsepower engine provided standby power. This service was provided until 1920 when they sold out to Northern States Power. The flume continued to supply power for the mill for some time after and is still intact today although it has been cemented shut.

The dredging of the Root River, starting in 1918 and officially known as Judicial Ditch No. 1, greatly changed the course of the river north of Hokah. What was left of Edward Thompson's river dam was also dug up at this time.

A 1933 directory of business places in Hokah would have included: four general stores, three service stations, two cafes, a bank, car dealership, meat market, flour mill, hardware and lumber store, cheese factory, creamery, barbershop, newspaper, automotive repair shop, as well as several individuals engaged in a service type business.

A city hall was built as part of the Works Progress Administration in 1938. The village's share of the cost of \$34,000 was \$14,000.

Hokah celebrated its centennial on August 26, 1951. It consisted of a parade and pageants. During this time and until 1965 William Langen's Log Cabin Museum was a popular spot for anyone interested in local history.

Hokah's sewer system was installed in 1959.

Fun Daze, a celebration first held in 1966, has consisted of many different recreational sports including a canoe race held on the Root River.

Como Development Corporation which was organized for much of the same purpose as the Lake Como Park, Inc. built a swimming pool in the old Lake Como bed in 1968. In 1974 the corporation built a bath house. The pool and surrounding area were turned over to the city in 1981.

In 1981, Hokah improved the water system with a new well, reservoir and water mains.

### [Summary of Hokah City Hall Renovation as of 2-17-2008](#)

Hokah Township is the second river township from the northern boundary of Houston County, lying south of La Crescent, having Mound Prairie and Union Townships to the west and Brownsville to the south, with the Mississippi River as the eastern boundary.

The name Hokah is of Indian origin and according to tradition, it was also the name of a powerful Indian Chief whose village stood on the beautiful spot now occupied by the City of Hokah.

Root River enters the township from the west and winds in an easterly direction through the northern half of the township until it empties into the Mississippi. The valley of the river has an average width of two miles. The river is joined by other streams: the most important of which is Thompson's Creek which furnished reliable water power.

As of other river townships, Hokah has the usual bluffs facing the Mississippi, with interior valleys, ridges and plateaus and the scenery is very picturesque. In the early days, the bottom land was heavily timbered with black walnut, maple, oak and other hardwoods, large quantities of which were cut and rafted down the river and some of which were sawed in local mills.

The first permanent settler in the township was Edward Thompson, who arrived in the spring of 1851. Attracted by the fine water power, he staked out a claim and brought his wife and family here.

Butterfield Valley south of the village was first settled in 1853 by Hiram Butterfield who came from Illinois and took a claim in Section 8. John Densch, who arrived in 1854, was probably the first settler on the "ridge". His log cabin had a sail for a roof which he brought from the east.

The Root River Brewery was located on Section 28. It was erected in 1867 by Joseph Pfeffer, Jr at a cost of about \$10,000, and it had a capacity of thirty gallons a day.

A union cemetery on Section 10 was divided by an imaginary line into two equal parts;

one half of which belonged to the Roman Catholics and the other half to the German Lutherans and the German Methodists. The first burial was in 1859, a son of Fred Glassert who was about 12 years of age.

An Academy of the Sisters of Notre Dame was erected in 1866 in the northeast corner of Section 28. There were accommodations for borders as well as day scholars and at times there were as many as forty regular boarding pupils in this large building of stone on this 200 acre plot of land. There was a small burial place for the sisters and the priests.

Another cemetery was blessed about the year of 1873 on this land and the wife of J. G. Streigel was the first burial here. There are still people being buried in this cemetery in the 1980s and the perpetual care makes it a pleasant resting place.

In the last half of the 20th century, Hokah Township provided excellent building sites for people who had employment in La Crosse, Wisconsin. The plotted additions that are recorded are as follows: Brookwood Hills, Sept 7, 1972, First Addition to Brookwood Hills, Aug. 21, 1974, Wagner Addition, Dec 27, 1971, Root River Terrace, Nov 10, 1970; E. E. Bentahl's Fox Chase Road Subdivision, March 23, 1973, E. E. Bentahl's Fox Shadows Subdivision, Nov 28, 1978. The 1982 Township Officials for Hokah Township were: Clerk, Barbara Ratigan; Treasurer, Gertrude Wieser, Chairperson, Robert F. Tschumper and Supervisors, Lloyd Welke, and Duane Frauenkron.

*Submitted by Barb Bissen*

1860 Hokah Census Index for Hokah Township

## [Hokah Effigy Mounds](#)



T.H. Lewis described the Hokah Mounds in an article in *Science* (Vol. 106, 1885):

"There are three mounds on the public square, one being a bird effigy, [Figure 2B] 70 ft. above the Root River, its height being 1 1/2 ft. Length of body is 87 ft., span of wings is 225 ft. The wings of this effigy are slightly flexed backward. The body is rounded at its extremity. A smaller bird effigy, [Figure 2C] 60 ft. above the river... has no flexure in its wings and has a rectangular termination of its body. Another animal effigy [Figure 2A] is on lot 1, block 17, at 95 ft. above the river. From the extremity of the snout to the tip of the tail, its length in a right line is just sixty-two and a half feet, and the body is a foot and a half in height.... Formerly there existed several other effigies, and thirty or forty mounds and embankments, on the same terrace with the birds, which have been removed in grading streets and lots."

Figure 2. (A) shows Hokah's animal effigy (deer? fox?), (B) shows the 225 foot wingspan bird effigy formerly in the middle of Hokah, and (C) shows another smaller bird effigy.

The animal effigy shown in Figure 2A could be a deer, but has a somewhat long tail for that representation. Something odd to note is that while the animal effigy follows the rule of heading in the direction of the flow of the Root River, its feet are on the opposite side from the waterway. The birds appear to be flying in the direction of the flow of the Mississippi River.



John Mumpy



John Beckett



Ben (Butler) Brown



Charlie Sauer



Arthur (Gabby) Heberlein

## The Cowboy Hat & the Whiskey Bottle

by: Bob Sauer (former Hokah resident)

They probably met by chance that day in the thirties. Each man taking time out from a busy day to go to the barber shop for a haircut. As they waited their turns, an itinerant photographer came in....and as they say 'the rest is history.'

### "A Western Saga - Hokah Style"

"Back in the mid-thirties, finding a job in Hokah (or anywhere else) was next to impossible. Hoboes and bums were rampant...hoboes rode the rails and lived in hobo jungles. Bums walked or hitched to towns looking for handouts and jobs. Many bums knocked on doors all over Hokah and most marked the location where they received a sandwich or meal from a generous family, for the next bum. Most offered to work for food by chopping wood. Some scratched out an existence by whatever means they could come up with.

Such was the case of the traveling photographers that were common in the thirties. One photographer in his twenties, wearing a large Stetson cowboy hat, dropped into the Barber Shop on a summer day in 1935. He was carrying a large bag with a leather strap over his shoulders. He told the barber that he'd take his picture and develop it on the spot for the price of a haircut and shave. The barber agreed to accept his offer, but he'd have to wait as there were four customers ahead of him. He seemed happy to wait and by the time it came for his haircut he had signed up the four customers to have their photos taken...at 25 cents each and 10 cents extra for copies. He said he would let them wear his cowboy hat for the photo...no extra charge!

After he took the photos he opened his bag of developing equipment. The finished photos turned out great. The barber asked his friends to stick around after the photographer left.

He asked the group if they'd mind giving him one of each of their photos. He said he intended to put all the photos in a frame and entitle it "Heading For The Last Round-Up", because, he said, "All of us, before long will be headed for that big Round-up in the sky." (I'm Heading For the Last Round-up' happened to be a popular western cowboy song at the time--sung by Gene Autry.)

He planned to hang the photo on the wall in the Barber Shop.

The barber also suggested that they all sign a pact subject to each one's approval. He mentioned that one of them, being part of the group and a big local beer distributor should buy a quart of the best whiskey available and he would store it in the basement below the Barber Shop. As part of the pact, as each one of their group passed on to the

happy hunting ground, the survivors would toast the deceased and all take a pull on the bottle after the funeral. The last to survive was to finish it off and shove the empty bottle into the casket with the corpse, or as an alternative, the last one to survive could take a drink and sprinkle the remaining contents over the grave. The only Irishman in the group particularly liked this option and asked if this could be amended so that he could run the remaining contents through his kidneys first.

They voted on it and the idea was accepted, specifically, that the empty bottle was to go into the casket.

The first to leave this earth was a bachelor, John Mumpy (the Irishman).

The second one to die, a widower, was John Beckett, he owned a horse with "The Halt". His horse's rear leg had a defect that would cause it to snap way up and drop down with every step.

The third to pass on, Benjamin (Butler) Brown owned the farm that Paul Schnedecker now owns.

The fourth to die was the beer distributor, Arthur (Cabby) Herberlein, who owned a cafe where the Hokah Country Market is was.

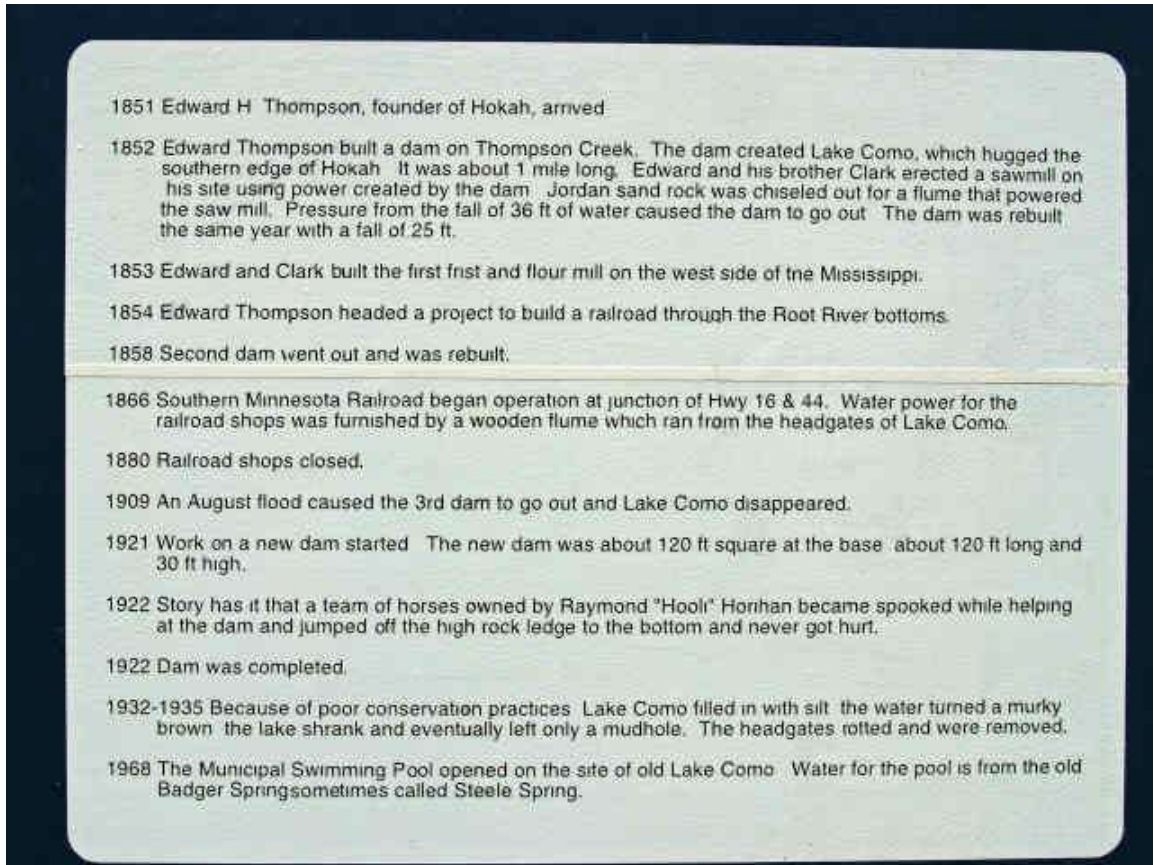
The barber, Charlie Sauer, the last survivor of the pact died in 1979 at age 87."

"In 1980, my brother Jim and I went home to settle Charlie & Kate's estate. There, in the basement of the Barber Shop, up on the rafters, lay an old vintage whiskey bottle covered with soot and dusty old cobwebs. It was an empty quart of Seagram's 7 Crown, 90 proof. Charlie was not quick to give up a treasured memory...pact or no pact! It currently rests on a shelf next to the Barber Pole and the photos of the five cowboys, in my game room, and it is a treasured memory for me."

"Stories of Hokah from Aggie's View" by Agnes Tippery.

Printed by Supreme Graphics, Arcadia, Wisconsin. 2001, 202 Pages

A Collection of stories of Hokah and its people, spanning the years from the 1930's to the present.



Email [aggietippery@acegroup.cc](mailto:aggietippery@acegroup.cc) to purchase a copy of Aggie's Book.









L. ANGEN'S LOG CABIN MUSEUM  
HOKAII, ALASKA.



Good Falls, Hokaia, Alaska.



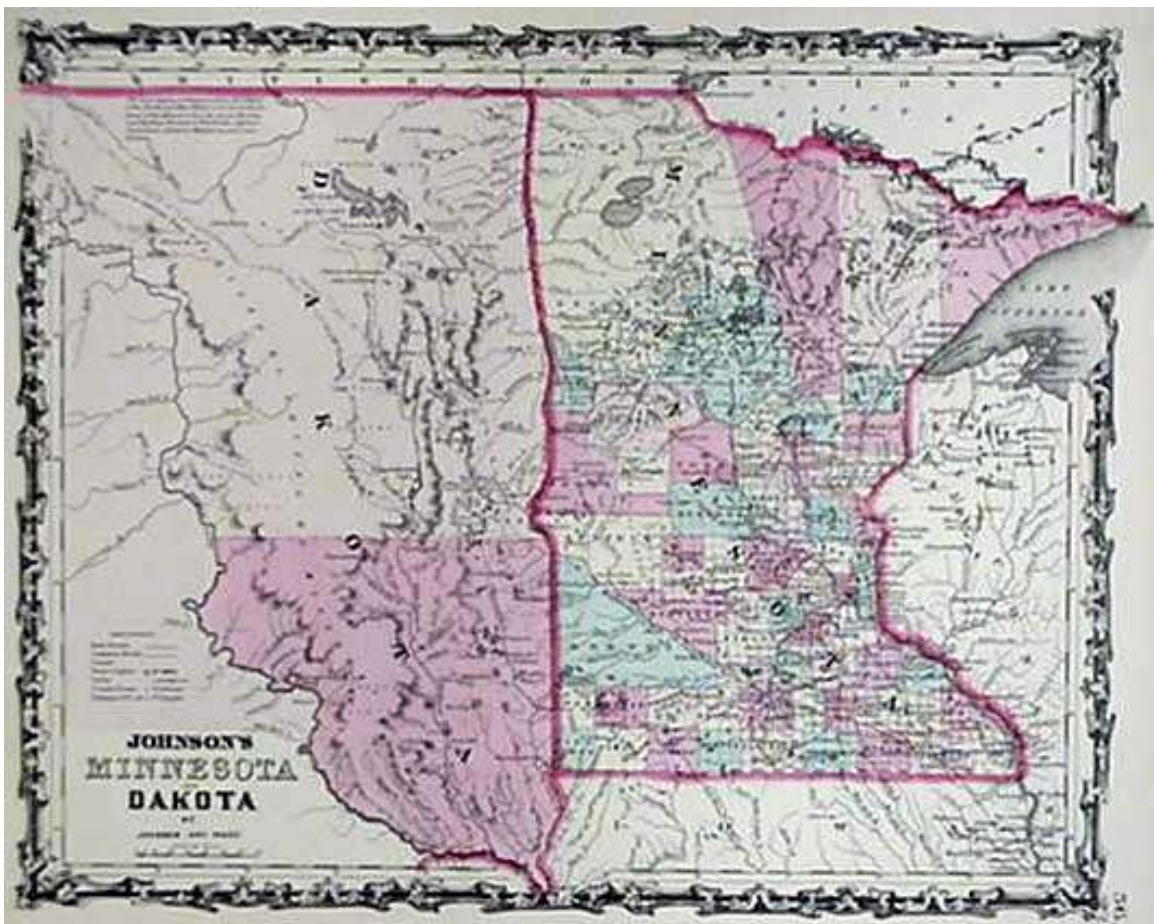
1217



ROXBORO - CORNER END OF MAIN & CHURCH, WINTER, 1944



MAIN ST. HOKAH MINN



Can anyone identify the people in this photograph?

Please contact us if you can at:

## City of Hokah, Minnesota

507-894-4990 - Office  
507-894-3777 - Fax  
102 Main Street / PO Box 311  
Hokah, Minnesota 55941

Hint. Look at the young Girl. From the Hokah area ? !

