

RICHLAND COUNTY WISCONSIN HISTORY - 1906
B I O G R A P H I C A L P A G E S 661-663

James W. THOMPSON and Mary E. HARRIS

JAMES THOMPSON is one of the honored citizens and extensive farmers of Richland county, where the greater portion of his life has been passed, and he has the distinction of being a veteran of the Civil War.

Mr. Thompson is a native of the old Empire state of the Union, having been born in St. Lawrence county, N. Y., Feb. 26, 1841, and being a son of Gillman and Emeline (McCurdy) Thompson, the former of whom was born in New Hampshire and the latter in the state of New York. In the latter commonwealth their marriage was solemnized and there they continued to reside until 1855, when they came as pioneers to Richland county, Wis., passing the first two years in the township of Richland and then removing to Marshall township, where the father secured eighty acres of government land, in section 36, the entire tract being heavily timbered and isolated, as no roads had been constructed in the vicinity.

He erected a log cabin of the type common to the pioneer epoch and then essayed the Herculean work of reclaiming a farm from the virgin forest. He was successful in his efforts and became one of the substantial farmers and honored and influential citizens of his town. Two of his brothers, Aaron and Lemuel, likewise came to the county in 1855 and settled on the site of the present county-fair grounds.

Gillman Thompson espoused the cause of the Republican party at the time of its organization and was ever afterward a stalwart supporter of its cause. His death occurred in 1886, his wife having passed away in 1883. They became the parents of six children: Amarilla is the widow of Jarvis Kelly and resides in Chicopee, Mass.; Arvilla, Martha, and Mary are deceased; James is the immediate subject of this sketch; and Esther is deceased.

Mr. Thompson was eleven years of age at the time of his parents' immigration from New York state to the wilds of Richland county, where he was reared to maturity on the pioneer farm, assisting in its reclamation and availing himself of the limited educational advantages afforded in the primitive schools of the locality and period. He remained at the parental home until 1858, when he went to McHenry county, Ill., where he secured employment at farm work and where he was thus engaged until the outbreak of the Civil War.

He promptly tendered his aid in defense of the Union, enlisting, in August, 1861, as a member of Company H, Eighth Regiment of Illinois cavalry. He proceeded with his command to the national capital, where the regiment remained until the spring of 1862, when it proceeded into Virginia, as a part of the Army of the Potomac. Mr. Thompson participated in the many battles and skirmishes in which his command was involved and continued in active service until victory had crowned the Union arms. He was in St. Louis, Missouri, at the time of the final surrender and there received his honorable discharge, after a protected, faithful and gallant service as a soldier of the republic.

After the war he returned to the parental home, and he has resided in Richland county the greater portion of the time since that early period, being entitled to consideration as one of the sterling pioneer citizens of the county.

In 1901, he removed to Crawford county, where he purchased a fine property and where he remained until the spring of 1905, when he returned to his homestead in the town of Marshall, where he has a well improved tract of 223 acres, of which 175 acres are under cultivation. He still retains his estate of 360 acres in Crawford county, and of the same 150 acres are available for cultivation. Mr. Thompson is a carpenter by trade and for many years he has been a successful contractor and builder, in which line of enterprise he is still engaged, renting his farm but continuing to reside on the same.

He is an uncompromising Republican in his political proclivities and he has served as township assessor and as clerk of the school board of his district. He is a member of the Grand Army of the Republic at Richland Center and his wife is a member of the United Brethren church. They are held in high estimation in the county which has so long been their home and in which they are well known.

May 1, 1867, witnessed the marriage of Mr. Thompson to Miss Mary E. Harris, who was born in Syracuse, N. Y., being a daughter of Abraham and Charlotte B. (Ladd) Harris, the former of whom was born in England and the latter in Vermont. They were married in the state of New York, and there Mr. Harris was ordained in the ministry of the United Brethren church. In 1855 they came to Richland county, Wis., and settled on English Ridge, in the town of Marshall, where Mr. Harris died in 1862. His widow now resides at Boaz, Richland county.

Following is a brief record concerning their children: Mary E. is the wife of the subject of this sketch; Martha resides in Beloit, this state; Caroline is deceased, as is also John Freeman; Sarah M. resides in Beloit; and Eldora is a resident of the town of Sylvan, Richland county.

To Mr. and Mrs. Thompson have been born nine children: Earl J. is a machinist by trade and resides in Beloit; Esther E. is the wife of William M. Snow, a manufacturer, of Richland Center; Isabelle is the wife of Charles Pierce, of Seattle, Wash.; Bertha is the wife of Samuel E. Davis, a farmer of Richland township; Nellie is the wife of Earl Richards, a farmer of the town of Dayton, this county; Augusta is deceased; James F., who married Miss Lucy Thompson, resides in Beloit; Martha is the wife of Edward McKasky, a farmer of the town of Marshall; and Violet died in infancy.