

A Biography of Jose Merrick Riddle

1808-1855

Elmer D. King

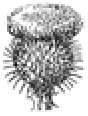
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by Elmer D. King

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Preface

In the summer of 1956 after the writer had been retired from the local electric light and power company he resolved to spend some of his newly acquired spare time investigating family history. The inspiration came from his memory of what he was told by his maternal grandmother and from old letters, papers and books that had been retained in the household for many years. A brief survey indicated that all eight of his maternal great, great grandparents migrated from Massachusetts or Vermont to Newbury Township, Geauga County, Ohio, about 12 miles east of Cleveland. These circumstances invited further study, which developed into a project finding expression in two manuscripts. This was compiled along with another manuscript, *The Yankees Migrate to "New Connecticut."*

Included with this manuscript is a bibliography of principal sources of information used by the author in its compilation.

Mrs. Birday E. King, wife of the author, deserves much credit in her role of critic and frequent helper in research and field work.

Elmer D. King

February 19, 1964
Birmingham, Michigan

Publisher's Note

As described in the Preface, this book was written after the author retired. I remember watching "Uncle Elmer" working in his basement, utilizing the most elaborate photographic set-up this young-at-the-time child had ever seen. His efforts were, in large part, related to his genealogical research – copying the documents, letters, and etc. that formed the foundation of this book.

After his death I was given many of his genealogical papers. Among them was a copy of this book, typed on onionskin paper. Knowing a little of the effort that went into researching and compiling this work, I decided to publish it. This is consistent with the author's desire to ensure that as many people as possible have access to previous research.

The majority of the modifications made to the original manuscript are cosmetic. Also, the index was expanded to contain every name appearing in the book.

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Massachusetts Birthplace

Jose, the second child of Thomas and Minerva Riddle, was born in Monson, Hampden County, Massachusetts on the 27th^[H1] of July, 1808.^[O1] He was born in the new house built by his father on the farm of his paternal grandfather, located about two miles south of the then village of Monson. He was named after his maternal grandfather, Jose Merrick.^[H21] In his youth he was called “Jo'se”,² sometimes spelled Josy or Josee. In his more mature years he was known as “Merrick.”

We find very little about Jose's first nine years in Monson. He may have attended the common schools in Massachusetts. If he attended school, we know he would have preferred to be out of doors. As quoted from A.G. Riddle in the *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* [Ohio],^[H3] “The paternal farm was of Massachusetts rills, rocks and sand, with one or two small alder swamps; one fine trout stream traversed it, called “sap brook,” for a clump of maples that grew near it. The family was well to do, and the child early developed the hardy, cheery, active spirit, delighting in free out-door action, which marked his life.”

¹ The *History of Geauga and Lake Counties* [Ohio] gives the day as the 26th. The day given here is the same as in the Ridlon Genealogy, the *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* [Ohio], and the Bible Register of Minerva Riddle.

² In the Oxford self pronouncing Bible, King James version, St. Luke 3-29, the word “Jo'se” will be found. In the quit-claim deed from the heirs of Thomas Riddle, dated September 4, 1838, the name is spelled “Josy.” Deed recorded September 16, 1838 in Vol. 16, Pg. 317.

Life in Newbury Township, Geauga County, Ohio

In the fall of 1817,^[01] the Riddle family said good-bye to Monson and journeyed overland to a new home site in Newbury, about 28 miles east of Cleveland. Jose shared with his older brother, Almon, one of the thrilling experiences of the journey by riding the mares hitched ahead of a team of oxen drawing their stout wagon, the only means of transportation for themselves and all their possessions.

Busy days followed the migration. Jose assisted as his age would permit in building their log house, clearing the land and providing for livestock, etc. so they might be self-sufficient farmers. Quoting further from the *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* [Ohio],^[H3] “Never was a boy better fitted by spirit, hardihood, activity and strength for the rude stimulating life of the frontier. Born insensible to fear of men or beasts, understanding woodcraft almost by instinct, gay and gallant of spirit, self-devoted and hopeful, few boys ever got more out of such life, or made themselves more useful in the woods.”

Just as they were overcoming some of the natural handicaps of their environment, the father died from a malarious fever on September 13, 1823.³ ^[01] Nearly the whole family were stricken with it, except Jose.^[020] The death of Thomas Riddle upset the economic balance of the family and shrouded its future with uncertainty. Almon, the oldest boy, was incapacitated by the fever for several months after his father’s death.^[01] It was left to Jose, 15 years of age, to carry on the best he could. Later, when his brother Almon had recovered, he assisted him with the farm chores.

In the *History of Geauga and Lake Counties* [Ohio]^[H2], at page 182⁴ is written, “In the fifth [1828] or sixth year of her widowhood she [Mrs. Minerva Riddle] married a gentleman from a distant town and took the younger children [Minerva, Jr., Roswell, and George Washington] to his home. But four or five weeks discovered his unfitness as a husband and father by reason of intemperance, and she took her children and returned to her old home. The husband and wife never met again. One of the younger sons took possession of the farm and comparative prosperity returned to her household.”

With the departure of the mother from home, the four older boys were apprenticed, working or otherwise living away. Jose was apprenticed to Joel Chapman of Mantua, Ohio, who taught him carpentry.^[H3] He became a “master builder.” In 1831, we find Almon and Jose building houses in Newbury, assisted by Albert.

When Mrs. Riddle returned to her original home in Newbury, the buildings were becoming dilapidated. There were no livestock or provisions. W.H. Harrison, her fourth oldest son, with some assistance from his older brothers, had to start much from scratch.

³ The date agrees with that read from tombstone in 1926 for the Western Reserve [Ohio] Historical Society.

⁴ A slightly different recording will be found on page 105.

However, by 1835 Harrison, with the help of his younger brothers, had put the farm in shape and left to study law in Jefferson, Ohio. The boys remaining on the farm were Roswell, 15 years, and George, 12 years. Although we do not find a statement to that effect it would seem that Jose must have returned home and started to build a house looking forward to his own marriage.

On February 23, 1836, Jose married Caroline Hayden,^[H2] the eldest daughter of Moses and Elizabeth Hayden. The Haydens had come to Newbury from Massachusetts in 1828 and moved on to what had been known as the Hiram Colton farm two miles west of the Riddle homestead. The marriage of Jose and Caroline took place two weeks after the marriage of their close friends, Clark Robinson, Jr. and Emiline Munn, the youngest daughter of Marsena and Dalinda⁵ Munn.

The Riddles' first child, a boy, was born on January 10, 1837⁶ and named Thomas Elmer by his maternal grandmother. Frances C., the second child of Jose and Caroline Riddle was born on May 4, 1838.⁷

As of September 4, 1838, Jose M. Riddle received from the other heirs of the Thomas Riddle estate a quitclaim deed (recorded in Vol. 16, Page 377) to the homestead lot purchased from John Wyles in 1817. This was Lot 7 of Tract 3 in Newbury Township. At the time, the mother, Minerva Riddle, and her younger children, Minerva Jr. , 18 years; Roswell, 16 years; and George Washington, 13 years; were presumably still living in the original log house at the southwest corner of the lot. Jose cleared a wide stretch across the entire front of the lot, built new barns and a house for his own family a short distance east of the old homestead.^[H3]

The reader may have wondered about the equity of the heirs deeding all of Lot 7 to Jose with the mother and minor children still living on the premises in a separate house. On November 18, 1842, the heirs of Thomas Riddle, including Jose, quit claimed their interest to a strip of land easterly of and bordering the western boundary of Lot 7, containing 67 acres and upon which the old homestead was situated, to Roswell and George W. Riddle. This left Jose M. Riddle with the easterly 103 acres of Lot 7 upon which were located his own house, barns and other buildings.

Corwin, the third child of Jose and Caroline Riddle, was born on August 17, 1840.

Like his father, Jose accepted civic responsibilities.^[H3] In 1841 he was Newbury Township Clerk, following Thomas A. Munn, and in 1842 and 1844 he was Assessor for the township.

⁵ Spelling as shown in family records from Leslie G. Munn, on tombstone, and real estate transfers in 1824.

⁶ The Clark Robinson Bible Register shows the year to have been 1836, as opposed to four other sources showing 1837.

⁷ Date taken from tombstone in Thetford, Genesee County, Michigan.

Move to Thetford Township, Genesee County, Michigan

In July, 1845, Jose and Caroline Riddle traded their farm in Newbury for 240 acres of unimproved wild land in Thetford Township, Genesee County, Michigan. The trade was made with Aretus G. Smith and wife Heturah, of New York State, who took up residence on the land in Newbury.

In the biography of Jose M. Riddle in the *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* [Ohio], A.G. Riddle makes this statement about the removal to Michigan, “The markets and times were adverse. A part of his mother’s family were on his hands. No exertions could meet and overcome the difficulties which gathered around him. He finally exchanged his property in the homestead for wild land in Genesee County, Michigan and in 1845 he made a new home in the woods of Thetford, miles from any other cabin, still occupied by native Indians, and swarming with all the animals ever known to that region, especially bears.”

The national economy may have had an indirect bearing on the move. Some idea of the business and financial conditions in 1845 may be obtained from the booklet “Detroit in ’49”^[H22] by George B. Catlin. “The lack of money of par value had hampered the development of business enterprises.

Out of the chaos of the early days came some semblance of financial system, but people had not yet forgotten the disastrous panic of 1837 and the years of financial uncertainty that followed.”

The *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* [Ohio]^[H3] states that, “The great drought of 1845 was very severe.” Between April and September, 1845, very little rain fell in Newbury. In A.G. Riddle’s book, *Elmer Riddle, A Sketch of his Life*^[H21] he states that Elmer, once each day, drove all the stock to water at the mill pond formed in the outlet from Punderson Lake.

Perhaps the long drought was the last straw in weighing the decision to migrate to Michigan.

The status and location of members of the Thomas Riddle family in 1845 as Jose moved to Michigan is informative.

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1. Mrs. Minerva Riddle, the mother, was 59 years old and resided in Newbury on the site of the original log house. Living with her was her son Roswell, 25 years old and not married.
2. Almon, the oldest son, had married Caroline Olivia Marsh in 1837. They had one or more children and were living in Wabash County, Indiana. He was a carpenter.
3. William Henry Harrison had died in Painesville, Ohio in 1837. He had practiced law for a very short time and had not married.
4. John Adams had married Lois Odell in 1837. They lived in Newbury and had had one child.
5. Albert Galatin had married Caroline Avery in January, 1845. Their first child, Florence, was born late in the same year. He was practicing law in Chardon, Ohio, having been admitted to the Bar in 1841.
6. Minerva, Jr. , the only daughter, had married Varnum N. Clark in 1839. They had several children and were living in Wabash County, Indiana.
7. Roswell was living with his mother as above stated.
8. George Washington had died in Wabash County, Indiana in March, 1843. He had been a schoolteacher and had not married.

Jose was 38 years old in 1845. He liked farming, had had many years of experience, and lived close by the house in which his mother and Roswell lived. No doubt many chores were done in common and he was consulted and asked to lend a hand many times. His availability perhaps prevented Roswell from assuming the responsibility that he otherwise would have.

With their three children, Jose and Caroline Riddle journeyed to Michigan some time in August, 1845.^[H21] They chose to take a steamboat from Cleveland, Ohio to Detroit, Michigan. The steamboat was an easy mode of travel. However the wooden hulls and boilers fueled with wood always made the risks from fire very great. Of the 39 steamboats that had plied the Great Lakes up to that time, 30 had been destroyed by fire.

A search through the Arrivals and Clearances at the Port of Detroit as published in the *Democratic Free Press* during August 1845, does not give a clue as to the name of the boat taken by the Riddles. The *History of the Western Reserve* by Upton includes a picture of the side-wheeler Empire State in the Cleveland Harbor in 1849. The picture depicts the types of boats in service and the extent of port development in those days.

At Detroit the Riddles were met by Hiram Covill who forwarded their household goods by "land carriage," a term used by A.G. Riddle.^[H21] The Riddles found the

commercial and residential districts still confined to an area near the riverfront with Woodward Avenue running northerly through its center. On top of the riverbank where the principal streets ran away from the center, like spokes of a wheel, they saw the City Hall and the Vegetable Market. On the west side the belfry of the Capitol Building, reminiscent of the Michigan Territory, loomed high above the other buildings. The old Capital Building was then serving as a common school house. High schools had not arrived. Nearby was the Andrews Railroad Hotel in back of which was the Detroit and Pontiac R.R. depot. The city was still lighted by tallow candles. All men wore leather boots. Two wheeled horse drawn carts were a common sight. The telegraph was in the experimental stage and shown for a fee as a marvel of the times. Today the Detroit Civic Center has moved back to the riverfront as in the days of the old French town.

If a newspaper meant anything to the Riddles, a copy of the *Democratic Free Press* could have been purchased on their way up town. The *Detroit Free Press* continues as the only morning paper. In 1845, the newspapers showed great concern over the large number of bad fires in the United States. The *Oakland County Gazette* [Pontiac, Michigan] warned against the admission of Texas into the Union and consistently fought the idea. A story about a man going berserk in Ann Arbor, Michigan was obtained from an eyewitness “just off the cars.” Most of the out of town items were copied from other papers. There were advertisements by private high schools for pupils on payment of tuition.

How the family was transported to Thetford we do not know. They may have ridden along somehow with the household goods or taken the railroad to Pontiac and then by stage to Flint. If they did not bring livestock with them perhaps they bought a horse and wagon for their immediate use and at their new homeland in Thetford.

At the time the railroad was doing a good business. In 1845 the cars of the Detroit and Pontiac Railroad were drawn by a locomotive with two pairs of small pilot wheels ahead of one pair of larger drive wheels. It was a wood burner without a tender, of Baldwin manufacturer and identified at first by the name “Sherman Stevens” and later changed to “Pontiac.” Passengers were expected to help load wood on the cars at convenient points along the route. The passenger cars were divided into three compartments with seats running lengthwise and side entrances. These box-like cars were mounted on four wheels with springs of white ash. The train ran on strap iron fastened to wooden stringers laid on top of the ground without much of any foundation or ballast.^[H22] In wet weather the mud would fly with the passing of the train, much to the dislike of the citizenry who started a feud with the railroad company. The *History of Detroit* by Silas Farmer contains the information that an advertisement in the Directory of 1845 says, “The Company have now a new and elegant car on the road, well warmed and sheathed with iron to guard

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against danger from loose bars.” The track iron would work loose and rip up through the wooden floor of the cars, sometimes causing serious injury to passengers.

In 1845 Flint consisted of two thriving communities, Flint River and Grand Traverse (river crossing). Flint was never incorporated as a village but was incorporated as a city in about 1855. Flint apparently did not have a newspaper in 1845.

The objective of the Riddles was the Center of Thetford Township, which is about 11 miles as the crow flies in a northeasterly direction from the point in Flint where the Saginaw Road crosses the Flint River.

Settlement in Thetford Township

Part of the surface drainage from Thetford Township flows into the Saginaw River by way of the Flint River. Something of the early history of the Saginaw Valley and applicable to Thetford is found in a booklet published by Genesee County, 1960-61 and from which the following quotation is taken.

“Until late in the 17th century, the region of the Saginaw valley was inhabited by the warlike Nation of the Sauks. Their territory stretched across the lower peninsula in a broad band between the uplands of the Shiawasee River and the northern promontories of Thunderhead bay. They had neither advanced social civilization nor permanent dwellings, and lived on the plentiful wild game and wild rice that flourished in the swamplands. The frequency of their raiding warfare upon the Pottawattommies to the south and upon the Chippewas and the Canadian tribes to the north led those nations at last to united action. The combined war strength of the Menominees, Ottawas, Chippewas, Pottawattommies, and the Six Nations from New York descended without warning upon the Sauks, at some time near the end of the century, and wiped them out. The piles of the dead were buried under banks of earth that still mark their place. Two of the largest mounds are along the Flint River, the first a mile above the village of Flushing, the second on a high bluff, half a mile below the city of Flint.”

In 1835 when Genesee County was set off,^[H4] Thetford Township was a part of Vienna Township, a “wilderness” untouched by white men, except for section corner blazes made by the surveyor’s axe. The original surveys in Michigan contemplated parallel roads one mile apart, both in the east-west and north-south directions, thus marking the township in the familiar checkerboard pattern, each square mile constituting a section. Townships were intended to be six miles square. In legal descriptions Thetford Township is often designated as Town 9 North, Range 7 east from the Michigan Meridian.

The first settlers in what is now Thetford Township made their homes near Saginaw Road (US 10) in the southwest corner of the township. Settlers trickled into the interior from 1837 to 1839. The Richard Buell family came the latter year. The only lake of any size in the township is named for them. In the early 1840s new settlers came in at an accelerated rate. They were no doubt influenced by the completion of about 15 miles of road. The roadwork included what is known as Vienna Road from the west town line to at least as far as the center of what is now Thetford Township and several short stretches of road in the south half of the township. It was several years before any further roadwork was undertaken.

In 1842, the 36 square miles now composing Thetford Township were set off from the east part of Vienna Township to form a new township. The first town board meeting was held that year.

A good understanding of the population density when the Riddles arrived in August, 1845, can be obtained from the *History of Genesee County, Michigan* by Everts and

Abbott, Philadelphia^[H25] in which is reproduced the tax roll for 1844 showing 25 names of resident taxpayers and the section in which their property was located. No one lived in 21 of the total of 36 sections (square miles) in the township. In fact only three or four families lived in the north half of the town and no one in the four square miles surrounding the center of Thetford. The southwest corner was the most thickly populated. The fact that cattle, sheep and swine were free “commoners” indicates sparse settlement and undeveloped land.

When the Riddles arrived they found an abandoned house about three miles from their “wild” land home site and set up temporary quarters there.^[H21] This meant a long walk for Jose and his son Elmer, at the beginning and end of each day spent improving the new home site.

The home acres extended one mile southerly from the center of the town on the east side of the north-south Center Road to what is now Wildon Road; being the west ½ of the west ½ of Section 22 and comprising 160 acres. The Riddle’s log house was constructed on the south side of Vienna Road about 300 feet east of the Center and just east of a knoll which served as a windbreak. The general lay of their land sloped southerly and away from the road.

What we know about the log house is found in A.G. Riddle’s biography of his nephew, Elmer Riddle,^[H21] in which he quotes his niece, Frances, for a general description. The log house faced the north and was two stories high in the front. The roof sloped to the south, the rear portion extending over the back steps. The wide, deep-set front windows afforded a good view of an attractive piece of woods. In February 1846, when they moved in, the interior of the building was not fully completed. Part of the first floor was used to store hay for the cow and for a workbench. In keeping with the times, a fireplace for cooking and heating was also located on the first floor. The second floor, termed a “chamber,” may have served other purposes than the usual loft for sleeping.

In February 1846 the family consisted of Jose, 37 years old; Caroline, 30 years old; Elmer, 9; Francis, 8; and Corwin, 6;

A minute book^[H26] kept by successive Town Clerks states that the annual town meeting for 1846 was held in Jose Riddle’s house. At the meeting the Board elected him to be one of the three Highway Commissioners with jurisdiction over District No. 3 comprising the east half of the town. The annual meetings for 1847 and 1848 were also held at the Riddle house. In 1847, Jose was elected a Highway Commissioner for a term of two years. In 1848 it was recorded that J.M. Riddle’s house was located at the Center. At that time there were probably no other buildings located at the Center.

The principal road through Vienna and Thetford Townships has been and is the Vienna Road. This road runs east from Clio, which came into being with the Pere Marquette R.R., through Pine Run on the Saginaw Road (US 10), and the Center of Thetford. In the early days the road terminated at the Thetford east town line. At present it is a hard surface road. The north-south road through Center is at present a gravel road serving the needs of local traffic. Originally this road ran only a few miles. The road limitations probably account to the Center not having been a focal point and for its slow development. The natural road to Tuscola is one mile to the west. Not even today is there so much as a gasoline pump at the Center. A school is the only sign of life on a normal weekday. A

grange hall, two churches and two town halls (old and new) are closed. Contrary to the inactivity indicated by these casual observations, the 1960 Census Report shows the population to have been 3,843 as compared with 1,861 in year 1890, an increase percentage-wise not equaled by nearby Clio or City of Flint in the same period.

During the first three years in Thetford the children Elmer and Frances (later to become Mrs. Philo Stafford) were obliged to walk three miles to school.^[H21] Frances vividly describes these journeys in A.G. Riddle's booklet describing the life of Elmer Riddle. The location of the school is not known. They first went to the Buell residence, about 1 ½ miles east on the south side of the Vienna Road, then took a one half mile of road and completed the trip following an Indian trail. The following quotation from the *History of Genesee County, Michigan* by Everts and Abbott, Philadelphia, gives background with respect to the trails and Indians in Thetford.

“These Indians belonged to the Chippewa nation and were only transient inhabitants⁸ here, they not having any village within the limits of the town. They came here to hunt and fish, though the latter sport was not as plentiful as the former on account of the lack of lakes and large streams. They had a well defined trail, which started from the bank of the Flint River, in the present town of Richfield and ran in a direction a little west of north and in a nearly direct course to Tuscola, on the Cass River, and to Saginaw Bay, near the present site of Bay City. This trail entered Thetford not far from the southeast corner and followed the pine ridges passing through the present [1879] Richard Buell farm and crossed the line into Tuscola county near the corner of sections 3 and 4. Along this trail the Indians traveled for many years, sometimes in large parties and again singly or by twos and threes. They were generally mounted on their hardy ponies, and in sandy places the hoofs of these sturdy animals had worn away the soil to a depth of a foot or more. These Indians remained here many years after the settlement of the county by the whites began, and the most amicable feelings existed between the two races at all times. They had a favorite camping place near the residence of Richard Buell, where two or three families, more or less as the case might be, would come and stay for a few days at a time while they hunted the deer and the other game with which the forest teemed. They were on especially friendly terms with the Buell family, for whom they conceived a great liking when they first settled there (1839 or 1840),^[H4] and with whom they often engaged in trade.

A map^[MA2] prepared for a land sales agency in 1858 and distributed in 1860 shows the area through which the trail traversed to have been covered with Beech, Sugar (maple), oak, Pine, etc. Little wonder that Elmer and Corwin became interested in bow and arrows, and with their mechanical ingenuity became experts in making their own equipment.

Chronologically the next major recorded event in the pioneer family was the birth of Laura, the fourth child, on May 13, 1848.^[H1] As before stated she was the first child born in Thetford at the log house. In April of the same year, Caroline's mother, Mrs. Moses Hayden, died. Subsequently her father made the Riddles such an attractive offer to run

⁸ A Wayne State University professor who has made a study of the Michigan Indians has been quoted as saying that for the most part they made their home in a definite area where they would raise crops. He also said they seemed to have practiced conservation on their hunting and fishing trips and did not deplete the game.

the Hayden farm that they left Thetford temporarily and returned to Newbury, Ohio in August, 1948.

A man who had purchased property on the opposite side of the Center Road for clearing was given certain privileges on the Riddle property in exchange for making certain improvements. He must have been in effect the caretaker.^[H21]

In September 1848 the Thetford Town Board noted that J.M. Riddle had removed from the town and named his successor to the office of Highway Commissioner.^[H21]

Return to Newbury, Ohio

The Hayden farm was located on the south side of Music Street, Newbury Township, Geauga County, Ohio, about 2 miles west from the homestead originally occupied by Thomas and Minerva Riddle. Some of Caroline's younger sisters had not yet married and presumably were still making their home on the farm when Jose and his family arrived in August 1848. [H23] The youngest one was Sarah who married I.N. Hathaway, a well-known lawyer of Chardon, Ohio in 1854.

Once again Jose and Caroline Riddle were in their home town with relatives and friends whom they had known for many years. The poll book of the election held in the Township of Newbury on October 10, 1848 gives the list of electors. Included are the names of John Riddle, Moses Hayden, Roswell Riddle, A.G. Smith, Clark Robinson, and W.A. Jenks who were known to have lived in the vicinity of the Hayden Farm. The poll book sheets are in the possession of the Geauga County Historical Society at Burton, Ohio.

Roswell Riddle, unmarried, still lived with his mother at the old homestead and in 1848 was Assessor for the Township. It was in this period that Clark Robinson and his wife, the former Emiline Munn both died of "consumption." The death of Clark in 1848 and Emiline in 1851 left their daughter, Laura, an orphan at 10 years of age. She was adopted by her Aunt Ann Munn and taken to the home of Laura's aged grandmother, Delinda Munn, the widow of Marsena Munn. Eleven years later she became the wife of Elmer Riddle, the oldest son of Jose and Caroline Riddle.

During the stay at the Hayden farm one child was born to of Jose and Caroline Riddle.^[H21] This child, named Mortimere, lived only a short time. This loss must have occurred in 849.

The Ridlon genealogy^[H1] states that the Jose M. Riddle family "went to Michigan in 1849." We know for sure that the family arrived in Thetford for the first time in 1845. Until further evidence is found we shall cling to 1850 as the date of return that fits in best with all other known conditions.

A.G. Riddle in his biography [H21] of Elmer Riddle written in 1884, quotes Frances, Elmer's sister, as saying that her father and Elmer returned to Thetford in April 1850⁹ and that her mother, with the rest of the children, followed in May. We do not have the particulars as to how the return journeys were made except that in the biography, A.G. Riddle mused over the early days in Newbury and imagined the feelings of Jose and his son Elmer as they walked over the hill on Music Street toward Cleveland on their return

⁹ 1850 is shown here instead of 1852 which appears in the biography because only 1850 would be consistent with all other recorded conditions. 1852 seems to have been an error in transcription. Furthermore, the 1850 U.S. Census of Newbury Township, taken the last day of August and the first of September, suggests that the Hayden Farm was being worked by a son and his family, not the Riddles.

to Thetford. From the top of the hill they would have had a good view of the scenes of their childhood. Music Street was likened to a straggling village street. We presume the pair walked to a stage line to Cleveland (total distance to Cleveland about 25 miles) and there took a boat to Detroit.

Back in Thetford, Michigan - 1850

After an absence of many months from their home in the Michigan woods the Riddles would anticipate some changes on their return. For one thing, virgin soil does not remain dormant. For a description of what they found we are again indebted to Frances, the oldest daughter, for the description given to A.G. Riddle in 1884.

Quote from page 30 of *Elmer Riddle, A Sketch of his Life* ^[H21] by A.G. Riddle:

“They returned eagerly to their little farm of twenty acres cleared in the woods. It had been left in the hands of a neighbor, who lived in the old ‘shingle shanty’ at the lower end of the garden, and who was clearing his own land on the west. He was to ‘slash’ twenty acres of woods – felling trees merely – put out an orchard for Merrick, and keep things in order.

“‘The lay of the land was about as we left it,’ says a graphic Frances, speaking of the return. ‘That was about all we found as we left it. Briars and weeds were in all fence corners, the fences down and rails scattered. Father said slashing well expressed the work done in the woods. It was now more labor to clear the land than would have been required, had the trees all still stood. The young orchard was a wonder to him. The man had set apple trees on his own land, where he had built a shanty. His trees were straight and thrifty, while ours were crooked and nurlly. It always remained a mystery to father. But the house – our neat, snug comfortable house with its sloping roof making a stoop to the south and its broad windows giving a view of the beautiful grove to the north. Oh dear! It had been converted into a dwelling, a shingle shanty, a chicken coop, a cow shed. Well poor mother shed tears and father shed some very expressive words with marked emphasis.’”

During the Riddles’ stay in Ohio other families had moved into the neighborhood and a schoolhouse had been built on the southwest corner of the Center. It was therefore no longer necessary to use the Riddle house as a town hall. However, Jose continued to help his neighbors with his skills and to serve the community in general. By April 1852, after the home acres had presumably been put in order, he was chosen the Supervisor of the township and also served as Assessor for that year.^[H26] For the first time in the annals of the town the results of a general election were recorded in the minutes of the Town Board.

One of the very few events found recorded in year 1850 is the birth of Charles Merrick on November 17. He was the sixth child of Jose Merrick and Caroline Riddle. Mrs. Mollie B Robertson, his oldest daughter, says he always signed his name using only initials. The Ridlon genealogy has him listed as Charles Mortimer. In the absence of birth records we will assume his name was Merrick¹⁰ the same as given to a grandchild and a great grandchild.

In 1853 Jose served as Justice of Peace and Overseer of Roads in District 7.^[H26] In that year, as in some previous years, the Township Board approved the payment of boun-

¹⁰ Charles was six generations removed from Thomas Merrick, his colonial ancestor and one of the founders of Springfield, Massachusetts.

ties on wolves and foxes. They also resolved that no more liquor would be served at township meetings. The year 1853 is the last year that the records of the Town of Thetford show Jose M. Riddle as holding any office. Prior to 1855, Thetford was said to have been in control of Democrats, but in that year a Republican landslide swept them out of office. The Riddles were categorically said to have been republicans, but this may not have applied to Jose in Thetford.

Jose and Caroline Riddle's seventh child, Maria, who became Mrs. Leonard Brown, was born on April 10, 1853.^[H1] The next vital statistic was the birth of Eleanor on April 11, 1855, the eighth and last of the Riddle children. Eleanor became Mrs. Richard Wood.

The Death of Jose M. Riddle

In 1855 Jose was very busy, among other things, hewing timbers for what was said to be the first hip roofed barn in the area.^[H21] In the midst of all this activity, the career of the framer, pioneer in two states suddenly ends on August 9, 1855 at the age of 47 years. In 1884, Albert G. Riddle, a younger brother, wrote of the death of Jose M. Riddle in this way.

“The summer of 1855 had been one of intense labor. About the first days of August, Merrick had the occasion to go to Flint to procure some iron work for his new barn, and as usual he plunged right into the woods towards night fall, of on Saturday in a right line for the town. He returned in the night and was ill the next morning. Tuesday he was delirious at times. Wednesday, Frances, who was teaching a few miles distant, was sent for and a young M.D. of the neighborhood was called. He saw nothing alarming. The sick man had over worked; would be up in a day or two. He was not; Elmer consulted a doctor in Flint. He sent some medicine, but the distressed youth hurried back and secured his personal attendance. It was all over on the ninth day.

“There were Johnsons and Staffords, and Fullers, Wilbors, Potters, and Bartholomews, Standards and Beards, and many more men drawn there because he was there.

“They came and buried¹¹ him on a lovely little swell of land in his orchard, a favorite spot of his and went on their ways.”^[H21]

With the death of her husband, Caroline, at age 39, was left with this family: Elmer, age 8; Francis, 17; Corwin, 15; Laura, 7; Charles, 4; Maria, 2; and Eleanor, 4 months; along with a 160 acre farm, the necessary livestock and other chattels.

What became of the family? This is reflected in subsequent census reports, histories, the Ridlon genealogy, and to some extent by A.G. Riddle in *Elmer Riddle, A Sketch of his Life*.

¹¹ Today a monument stands in the upper part of the old section of Thetford Cemetery in honor of J.M. Riddle.

Caroline Hayden Riddle Re-marries

About 1857 Caroline married Sherman Moulthrop, a Thetford farmer five years her junior. He owned a farm on the north side of the Vienna Road opposite the Riddle farm. He was the son of Isaac and Mary Moulthrop, early residents of the township and prior owners of the south part of the J.W. White farm.

After living a short time on the Sherman Moulthrop farm the newlyweds decided to reside on the Riddle farm. The log house was taken down and a frame house was erected on the same site.^[H21] The removal of the log house saddened the older Riddle children who had fond memories of the earlier days in Thetford. This was brought out in a poem written by Laura Riddle White after the death of her brother Elmer Riddle in 1883. (See Page 46 of the biography by A.G. Riddle.) Mrs. Eleanor White Bartholomew, a granddaughter of Jose M. Riddle remembers that the farm house had a porch across the front and west side and that a big living room had an open stairway to the second floor. The house, with some remodeling, still stands today at 4026 Vienna Road.

A wall map of Genesee and Shiawasse Counties^[MA3] by Geil and Jones of Philadelphia shows the Moulthrop property in 1859 as being 80 acres north of the Vienna Road and 80 acres directly opposite on the south side of the road. The 80 acres on the south was the north half of the former Riddle farm, the title to which was vested in Caroline Riddle in year 1845.

The 1860 Census Report lists the household as including the four youngest Riddle children: Laura, 12 years old; Charles, 9; Maria, 7; and Ella, 5; also Cora Moulthrop, 2; and Moses Hayden, their maternal grandfather, who was listed as a hatter.

Moses Hayden was reported as owning property in Thetford township valued at \$3000. The 1859 wall map^[MA2] shows Moses Hayden owning the northwest quarter of Section 21 (160 acres) and the west one-half of the southwest quarter of Section 22 (80 acres). The latter piece was formerly owned by Jose M. Riddle and was the south half of what comprised the former Riddle farm.

The older children were no longer needed at home. Frances had married Philo Stafford on October 4, 1857.^[H1] Mr. Stafford was a lumber mill operator.

Elmer returned to Ohio sometime in 1858. Corwin must also have returned to Ohio about the same time.

Elmer Riddle married Laura Robinson of Newbury in the home of her Aunt Ann Munn on June 6, 1862.^[O19] Laura was the daughter of Clark Robinson, Jr. and a granddaughter of Marsena Munn.

Thomas Corwin Riddle, after returning from distinguished service in the Civil War, married Antoinette M. Bartholomew of Thetford on December 3, 1865¹² and took up residence a short distance from his mother.

It was in this chronological order that the mother of Jose M. Riddle, Minerva Riddle, died on January 11, 1866¹³ while with her daughter, Mrs. Varnum N Clark, in Wabash County, Indiana. She was 81 years old. Her son, Almon Riddle, also lived in the same area.

The results of the 1870 U.S. Census in Thetford are not available. The 1880 Census Report shows none of the Riddle children living with their mother but does show the two Moulthrop children as living at home: Cora, age 21; and Mary, age 18. Cora was therefore born in 1858 or 1859 and Mary probably in 1862.

Eleanor Riddle married Richard Wood in September, 1873 and subsequently moved to Keokuck, Illinois. Mr. Wood was then a schoolteacher. In later years he became a medical doctor and practiced surgery in several towns in Michigan, including Lewiston.^[C1]

Maria Riddle married Leonard Brown, a Thetford farmer May 1, 1876.^[H20] They resided in Section 21 about 3/8 mile west of the Moulthrops on the same side of Vienna Road. Mr. Brown was a scientific farmer of his day. The *Portrait and Biographical Record of Genesee, Lapeer and Tuscola Counties* [Michigan] published by Chapman Bros., contains a picture of the Brown's farm, which was called "The Poplars" in a 1907 atlas.

Laura Riddle, Elmer Riddle's sister, married Jacob W. White, a school teacher and farmer on December 12, 1878.^[H4] The White farm residence is situated 3/8 of a mile north of the Center in Thetford Township and is now the residence of a daughter, Mrs. Nellie White Bartholomew.

Charles Merrick Riddle graduated from Poughkeepsie College, New York in June 1878, married Estell Stone of Newbury, Ohio on October 22, 1879 and took up management of some oil wells in Butler County, Pennsylvania immediately following his marriage.^[C2] Later he worked in the lumber mill industry and finally became a framer in Oregon and died near La Grande in November 1927.

In A.G. Riddle's biography of Elmer Riddle,^[H21] who met his death in a railway accident in the fall of year 1883, the indications are that family relations were good. This is judged from the visiting back and forth, the friendliness with the half-sisters and the respect of the grandchildren for "Grandpa and Grandma Sher." As one grandchild put it in later years, "I never knew the 'Riddles'."

From year 1884 to the death of Caroline Hayden Riddle Moulthrop on June 3, 1883¹⁴ we have found little of record. Apparently A.G. Riddle did not write further on fam-

¹² From "Certificate of record by Soldiers and Sailors Historical and Benevolent Society – Washington, D.D., June 27, 1910."

¹³ In her last years, Minerva Riddle apparently visited her children. A letter from A.G. Riddle, Chardon, Ohio, dated January 15, 1865, is in the files of the Geauga County Historical Society at Burton, Ohio. In this letter he told his mother that at the time he was living in a rented house, not a suitable place for her to visit. He also thought Washington, D.C. would be too warm for her in the summer. He said he enclosed the last letter he received from Merrick. She might like to keep it. What became of Merrick's letter is not known to us.

¹⁴ Taken from tombstone in Thetford Township.

ily history. Newspaper items were practically non-existent and a Genesee County history of the period has not been found.

Conclusion

In conclusion, Jose Merrick Riddle is visualized as a middle aged man, about 5 feet 6 inches tall, slight in frame, although of erect posture, with brown hair, blue eyes and smooth shaven face. He was quick in action. He liked nature and working with his hands. He was fearless of both men and animals. Jose seemed to have been a good provider for his family and was well liked by both men and women. He responded to civic demands upon his time. He was not a man of letters but enjoyed farming. Hard work was a part of his everyday life. Had he lived a few years longer he would have no doubt been rated a successful farmer.

Of the Monson, Massachusetts branch of the Riddles, few were notable in the eyes of the world. However they were respected citizens, often furnishing leadership in the community. The subject of this biography was no exception.

We are reminded daily how much more complicated man's environment is today than in the first half of the 19th century. However the part played by Jose M. Riddle and his contemporaries in developing our country is more readily discernable than that of most citizens of today who seem to serve as smaller cogs in the wheel of progress on account of the increased complexity of our society.

Bibliography

The bibliographies listed here correspond to the references in the text. The wide “gaps” in the numbering are due to the fact that these were collected for several projects, not solely this manuscript.

Published Histories and Genealogies

Note: All source items in this category can be found in the Detroit [Michigan] Public Library, unless otherwise stated.

- H1 *History of the Ancient Ryedales* by G.T. Ridlon – 1884. Contains a chapter on the Riddles of Monson, mass. Presumably this book can be found in the Western reserve Historical Association Library in Cleveland, Ohio. The copy listed in the Detroit [Michigan] Public Library cannot be located at this time. William V. Ward of Honolulu¹⁵ has a copy and Elmer D. King has a microfilm copy of the chapter referred to.
- H2 *History of Geauga and Lake Counties, Ohio* – 1878. Can be found in Geauga County Historical Museum at Burton, Ohio; at Western Reserve Historical Association Library in Cleveland, Ohio and other local libraries.
- H3 *Pioneer and General History of Geauga County* by Geauga County Historical Society – 1880. Can be found at the same locations as H2 (see above).
- H4 *History of Genesee County, Michigan* by Ellis – 1879. Can be found at the University of Michigan Library at Ann Arbor, Michigan and in the Flint Public Library, Flint, Michigan.
- H19 *Minutes of the Thetford Town Board*, Genesee County, Michigan. In the custody of the Town Clerk. Elmer D. King has photographic copies of pertinent pages from the Minute Book.
- H20 *Portrait and Biographical Record of Genesee, Lapeer and Tuscola Counties, Michigan* – 1892 by Chapman Bros.
- H21 *Elmer Riddle, A Sketch of His Life* by A.G. Riddle – 1884. Copy owned by William V. Ward and Walter P. Ward. Copy also owned by Dr. Paul Z. King. A photographic copy is owned by Elmer D. King.
- H22 *Detroit in '49* by George B. Catlin – 1921, presented by Detroit Savings Bank. Copy owned by Mrs. Elmer D. King.
- H23 *Biographical History of Northeastern Ohio* by Lewis Publishing Co. – 1893. Copy owned by Elmer D. King.
- H24 *History of Connecticut Valley; Vol II* by L.H. Everts – 1879, Hampden County
- H25 *History of Genesee County, Mich* – 1879 by Everts and Abbot, Philadelphia.
- H26 *The Fisher Genealogy* – 1869 by Philip A. Fisher.

¹⁵ Removed to Nelson, New Zealand in September 1965. His brother, Walter P. Ward is located at 148 Euclid Ave., Los Gatos, California 95030.

Maps

- MA1 Thetford Township, Genesee County, Michigan Map. A detached sheet from an atlas not showing publisher's name or date. Perhaps about 1908 or 1911. Photostat copy owned by Elmer D. King. Shows property ownership.
- MA2 Genesee and Shiawassee Counties, Michigan Wall Map by Geil and Jones, Philadelphia – 1859. Original in Flint Public Library, Flint, Michigan. Photographic copy in Michigan Collections at University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.
- MA3 Wall map of Saginaw, Tuscola and parts of Genesee, Lapeer, Huron and Midland Counties, Michigan – 1860. Put out by land sales agency but does not show property ownership. Does show character of the country. Found in the Michigan Collection, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Handwritten Documents and Other Data

- O1 *Letter of Almon Riddle to Albert G. Riddle* dated September 10, 1878. This letter is addressed to Almon Riddle's niece, a daughter of Albert G. Riddle. It describes the journey of Thomas Riddle and his family from Monson, Massachusetts to Newbury Township, Geauga County, Ohio. It also describes the early years of the family in Newbury. It is thought that Albert G. Riddle inspired the writing of this letter to record the family history.

In 1899 Albert G. Riddle, then 83 years old, was going over some papers and ran across the above-mentioned letter. He mailed it to Alice Riddle, a grand niece, a grand daughter of Jose M. Riddle and a daughter of Elmer Riddle, as something she would find of interest. "Uncle Albert" told her it was from her oldest uncle and if he could find the family Bible he would tell her how old he was. At the time Alice was 17 years old and lived in Chardon, Ohio. Her father dies when she was one year old and "Uncle Albert" from time to time sent reading material to her throughout the remainder of his life.

Alice Riddle married Hubert H. Ward. Her two sons, William V. and Walter P. Ward inherited the letter. Through the courtesy of the Wards, the writer has a photographic reproduction of the letter. Mrs. H.H. Ward placed a typewritten copy of this letter in the Western Reserve Historical Association Library in Cleveland, Ohio in 1926. The writer has a Photostat copy of the typewritten copy.

- O19 *[No reference found.]*

- O20 *[No reference found.]*

Correspondence

- C1 Mrs. Eleanor W. Poole – correspondence
- C2 Mrs. Mollie B. Robertson – correspondence.

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