

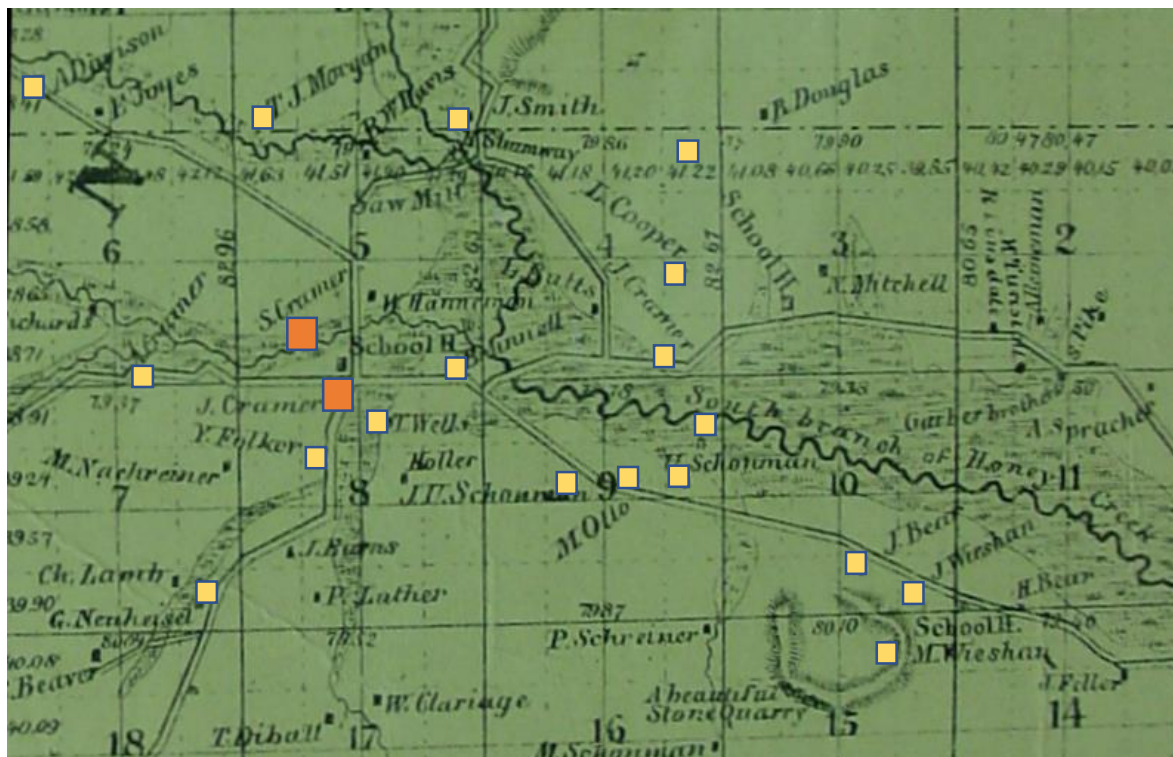
The Cramers of Plain, Franklin Township, Wisconsin

Ken Kraemer

Cramer vs. Kraemer

Everybody has heard of the Kraemers spelled with a ðKö but who has ever heard of the ðother Cramersö whose name is spelled with a ðCö? It turns out that the Cramers were as important to the early history and growth of Plain beginning in the 1850s as the other Kraemers were to the growth of Plain beginning in the 1920s. This essay is about these early Cramers.¹

1860 Plat map showing landowners. Red squares marks Solomon and John Cramer lands



First pioneers in Franklin Township

The Cramers were among the very first pioneers to Franklin Township, arriving in the late 1840s and early 1850s. The 1859 plat map of Franklin Township on the previous page shows them in the company of the other first families who were mainly English, Swiss, and German Protestants. They were also second-generation immigrants who had moved west from Ohio or further east: Dewitt Slaughter, T.J. Morgans, Thomas Wells, Robert A. Davidson, B. V. Bummell, John Smith, Andrew Cooper, William Henneman, Jeremiah Whiteis, Yost Folker (Volkel), John and Michael Weishan, George Neuheisel and Urs Schonemann (Thering, 1982; Mrytle, 1985). See names in yellow on the map on the previous page.

“Go West Young Man”

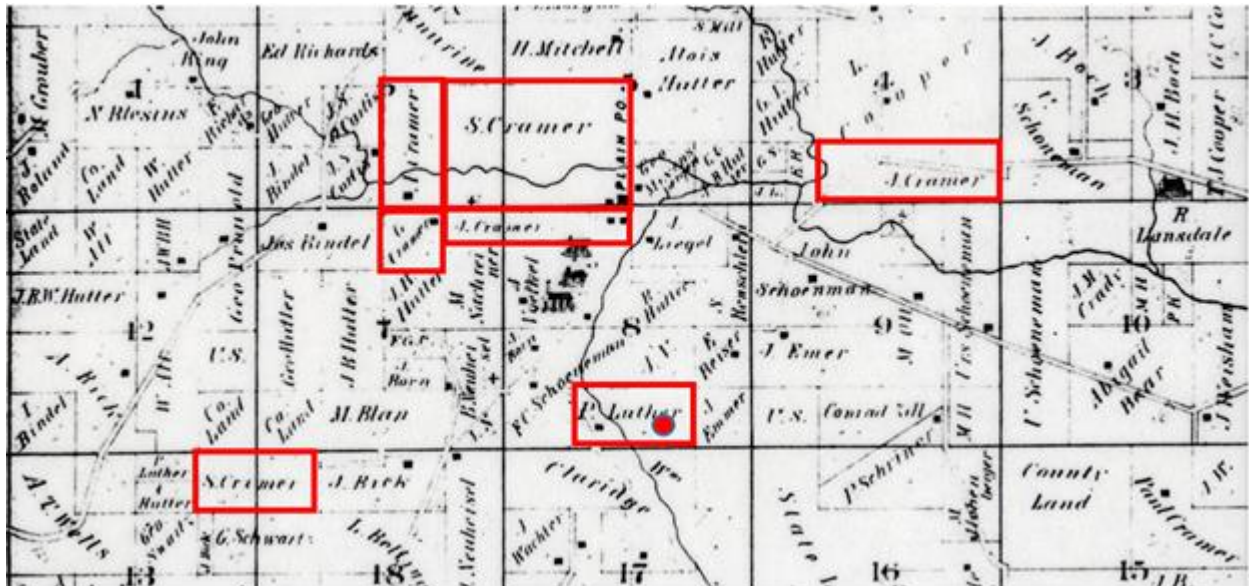
The Cramers had emigrated around 1824 from Letterkenny Township, Franklin County, Pennsylvania to Troy Township, Morrow County, Ohio where they spent a 20-year hiatus before coming to Franklin Township in Sauk County, Wisconsin. These Cramers - Jeremiah, John, Solomon, and Adam ó were the sons of Joseph Cramer, who was born in 1824 in Pennsylvania. In 1848, his son Solomon was sent to

¹ A complete history of these Cramers can be found in the book, The Other Cramers: Building a Wisconsin Community, 2018 by Ken Kraemer. It can be purchased from Amazon.com and OFTHS.

scout for new lands in the Wisconsin wilderness, and after the patriarch Joseph's death in Ohio in 1850², the other brothers trickled to Wisconsin.

When Plain was first settled, it was known as Cramer's Corners because the Cramers owned more than 400 acres at the two main intersecting highways running north and south and east and west - present-day Hwy 23 and County B. For the first 30 years, these Cramers were mainly farmers carving out the wilderness to literally create farms, fields for crops, and meadows for their livestock.

1877 Plat map, Town of Franklin



Meaning of abbreviations on the map: S. Cramer [sec. 5-6] = Solomon Sr.; G. Cramer [sec. 7] = George [son of John]; A. Cramer [sec. 6] = Adam Cramer; J. Cramer [sec. 7-8] & [sec. 8 sold to P. Luther in 1883] = John Cramer; J. Cramer [sec. 4] = Jeremiah Cramer; S. Cramer [sec., 13-14] = Solomon K. Cramer.

Solomon Cramer, Sr.

One of the Cramer brothers stands out as more than a farmer. Solomon Cramer was the third son of Joseph Cramer and Catharine Killinger. He had been born in Pennsylvania in 1821, moved to Ohio with the family, and moved to Franklin Township, Wisconsin in 1848. He married Mary Ann Engel from Switzerland in 1865. They had eleven children ó seven sons and four daughters. Solomon Cramer had the largest farm in the area (380 acres) to the north and west of the main intersection (see 1877 plat map on previous page). The farm was picturesque as shown in the photo on the following page.

² There are various dates within this essay as to when the brothers came to Wisconsin because they came in different years and because sources (newspapers, obituaries, other historians) differ as to dates. My best estimate is that Solomon was first and came scouting land in 1848, took up a homestead in 1849 and brought his mother Catharine, brother Adam, and nephew Joseph in 1851. John and Jeremiah came in 1852.



The beauty of the farm stems from the fact that Solomon was a carpenter by trade from his boyhood. As noted in his obituary:

Solomon Cramer, one of a family of six children – three boys and three girls – was born in Pennsylvania, March 3rd, 1821. Here, in his boyhood years, he chose carpentry as his vocation in life. Some years after, his parents and family moved to Ohio. While living there he pursued the same trade until, in the year, 1849, he came to Wisconsin, taking up a homestead... Weekly Home News, July 12, 1906.

Likely his carpentry and building work enabled him to accumulate the financial capital to buy so much land. He also had human capital in six sons - George, Solomon, Jr., Pearson, William, Jerry, and Ira ó whom he trained not only in farming, but in carpentry and building more broadly. These human resources allowed the flexibility for Solomon to become a leader, entrepreneur, and developer who will shape Plain into the 1900s.

Attempt to build a local Protestant community

The Cramer brothers and most of the first settlers in the Plain area were of the Protestant faith. Church and school were important to them. The first school was set up in 1861, and T.J. Morgans from Wales was its teacher. Also, in 1861, Solomon Cramer set aside land for an M.E. Church in the hope of attracting a minister and building a church. The effort was unsuccessful as an M.E. Church was chartered in Spring Green that same year. So, the Franklin Township pioneers mainly relied on itinerant preachers for religious community. The circuit was comprised of White Mound, Honey Creek, Harrisburg, and Spring Green.³ The meetings were held in schoolhouses until churches were built. It is possible that the lack of a social community around

³ See *Early History of the Spring Green Methodist Episcopal (M.E.) Church*, which covers the period 1861-1880. We have a few markers of the Cramers' religious connections, which are mainly with that Church. In 1851, Nathaniel Mitchel, Esq. united in marriage Solomon Cramer and Mary Ann Engel at her home. In 1891, Rev. D.M. Sinclair of the ME Church of Spring Green gave the eulogy for Solomon Cramer, Jr. at his home there. In 1875, Rev. J.H. Whitney of the M.E. Church in Reedsburg united Solomon Killinger Cramer with Samantha Rebecca Davis. In 1895, Rev. J.E. Webster of Spring Green gave the funeral service for Catharine Wells Cramer, the wife of Adam Cramer. In 1906, Rev. Prucia of Spring Green led the funeral service for Solomon Cramer, Sr. at the latter's home. In 1912, Rev. Neinstedt of the Black Hawk Evangelical Church united Oscar John Cramer and Caroline Barbara Schneller in marriage. See *The Cramer Family Tree* by Oscar John Cramer in *The Other Cramers*, pages 149-165.

a Protestant church in Plain had effects on out-migration of these Protestant pioneers when Bavarian Catholics flooded the area in the 1870s. In contrast, the Catholic church and school in Plain became the community heart binding it together and remains so today.

The Protestant community's dead were buried in the Pleasant Hill cemetery (County B west of Plain) on Solomon Cramer's land. A Pleasant Hill Cemetery Association, comprised of Catholics and Protestants, was formed in 1858 to administer the cemetery although people had been buried there earlier.⁴ Solomon did not officially donate land to the Association until 1869, but he must have given approval for burials. It is interesting to note that there was comity between the Catholics and Protestants of Plain early on. The church bell that tolled would have been that of the second Catholic church built in 1885 (Thering, p.156).

At the funeral (June 1887) of Mrs. Fred Schoenman (Margaret R. Born), young wife and mother (36y 11m 3d), the Catholic church bell tolled, as the long funeral procession of carriages passed, slowly, up the hill to the Pleasant View Cemetery (Thering, page 5).

Solomon as entrepreneur

Around 1870, Solomon, Sr. and his brother John Cramer sold the first lots for homes and commercial activity near the key intersection in Plain. The list below is gleaned from Thering's *History of Plain* and stories in the *Weekly Home News*. It is incomplete especially regarding homes. In addition, lots, homes, and businesses were resold over the years which masks the actual level of activity in the village.

1851	Joseph Cramer	lot sold to him by Sol Cramer
1866	John Cramer	first house in Plain; (later John Beck, Gust Hetzel)
1868	Bailey Wilcox	blacksmith shop on Cedar St. (later John Aron, Post Heiser)
1869	P.W. Perry	store
1874	John Ott	blacksmith
1875	Fr. Spitzelberger	St. Luke parsonage & 2-room school within
1876	Joseph Volk, Sr.	saloon and home (later Stautner saloon)
1877	John B. Liegel, Sr.	third house built in Plain; on Liegel Ave.
1879	Alois Hutter	store, living quarters, dance hall (cr. Main & Wachter)
1881	Joseph Cramer	lot sold by Sol Cramer; house built by Sol & Pearson
1883	Alois Hutter	store on Main St. (1890, Weiss & Beck store)
1883	John Cramer	new home built by Solomon Cramer, Jr. for his uncle
1884	Joseph Cramer	second house built for him by Sol & Pearson Cramer
1885	Mrs. Lemuel Cooper	home built by Cramer Bros.
1888	Fr. Pesch	new parsonage built by Cramer Bros. in Plain
1893	Philip Volk	shoe shop and home

⁴ This recording appears to be a formality as the site was already being used as a cemetery as early as 1857. Cushing notes that three burials occurred in 1857 and a number in the 1860s. The first burial was a child, Mary M. Renard, died January 3, 1857 at 7 months, the child of R. and L. Renard. Solomon's own son, Joseph D. Cramer died October 7, 1857 at 1 year and 9 months. Most of the early burials were of children. The first adult burial was Barbara Weaver who died November 8, 1861 at 52 years of age. A cemetery association of early pioneers had been organized already in April 1858. Several Catholics were members of the association, including Sebastian Reuschlein, Jost Fulker (Voelkel), Paul Luther and George Neuheisel. More information about the cemetery and its occupants can be found in Myrtle E. Cushing, Cemetery Inscriptions of Sauk County, Wisconsin, Volume 6, page 35 and following.

Starting around 1880, Solomon, Sr. built multiple businesses one after the other. He had four sons at home who could help with the farm and the new enterprises, so he was able to seize opportunities. In 1880, Solomon built a rolling mill (grain mill) on the Honey Creek. In 1883, he built a sawmill on his land at the corner of Main and St. Luke Avenue. In 1883, he created a brickyard on land along the south side of the Honey Creek in a clay deposit (later Edward Kraemer and Sons and The Kraemer Company). The *Weekly Home News* reported that the Cramer brickyard was in full operation:

The making of brick at the Cramer Bros brickyard will be completed this week. One kiln containing 125,000 bricks is being burned and another of 90,000 will be ready this week. The total number burned by them this past week is 475,000 (26 April 1883).

We do not know where those bricks went or how much production there was over the years, but it is likely they went to building projects of Solomon Cramer, Jr.

1900	Reuschlein Bros.	general store
1900	Haas	saloon
1900	Pete Plon	meat market
1901	Mike Paulus	blacksmith shop
1902	Cramer	sawmill started work
1903	Cramer Bros.	opened department store
1904	Cramer Bros	started to grind feed

Solomon Cramer, Jr. was 22 years old in 1880, a carpenter and already in the building business in Plain and the surrounding area. Later he moved the business to Spring Green but served a much broader area. Brothers Pearson and George S. Cramer along with relatives from Ohio were part of the crew. After Solomon, Jr. and George S. died in 1891, Pearson Cramer took over the business and broadened the crew outside the family.

In 1879, Alois Hutter built another store by Dresen Bros. at the corner of Main Street and Wachter Avenue with living quarters on the second floor and a dance hall on the third floor. Having sold his corner building to Mr. Wiemer for \$1000 in June 1883, Alois Hutter purchased 40 acres including a house from John Cramer in August 1883 and had a store built by Cramer Bros. on Main Street. It took a train of twelve teams to haul the lumber from Spring Green to Plain for the store. (Thering, p. 60).

In November 1900, about forty men gathered at the farm of Mrs. George Trumpp for the purpose of raising her new barn.... Being an octagonal barn, it was considered one of the best in this locality. The barn was finished by the Cramer crew, consisting of Pearson Cramer, D. W. Morgans, Ed Hood, George Nachreiner, and Mike Schwartz (Thering, p. 40).

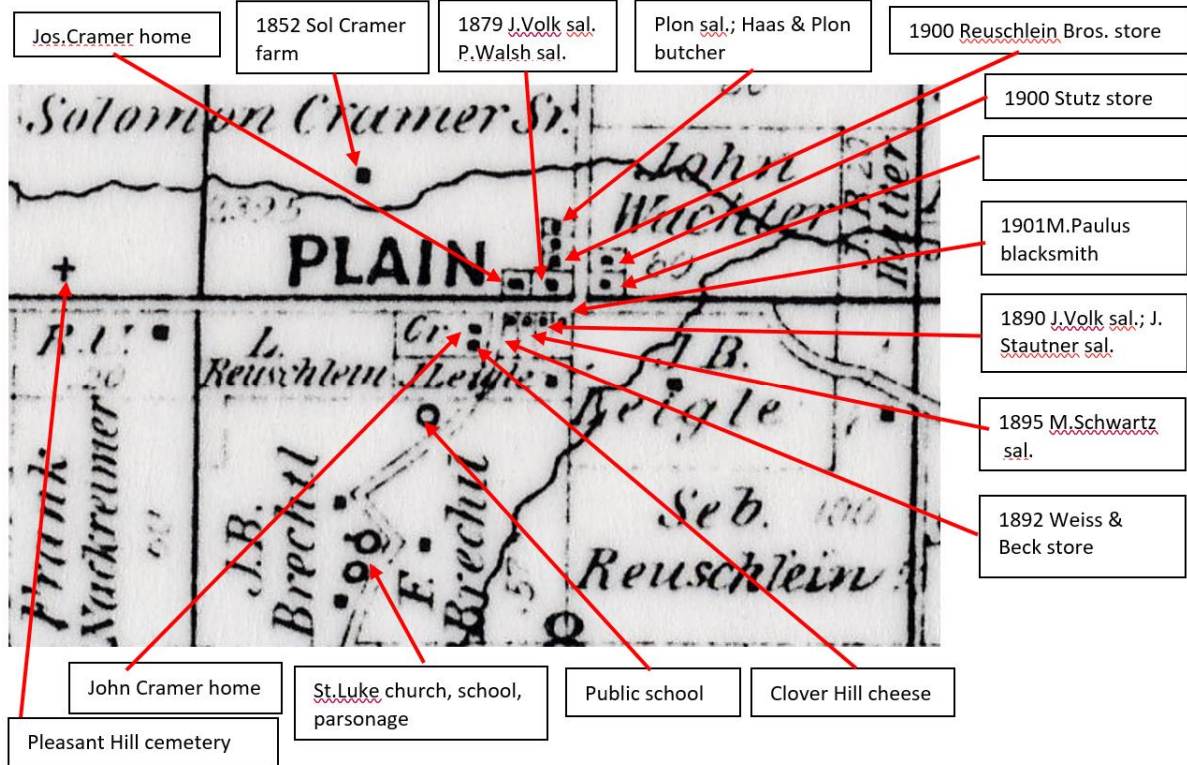
Plain in 1893

As mentioned above, Solomon and John Cramer had sold off land over the years⁵ and, as a result, there was a small business community at the main intersection of Plain as shown on the

⁵ Year	Grantee	Description	Price
1861	M.E. Church		reserved
1863	J.B. Hutter	lot	\$140
1865	Geo. Schwartz	lot	\$10
1868	Bailey J. Wilcox	lot	\$36

1893 plat map below. The businesses included two general stores, three saloons, a blacksmith shop, a butcher shop, and a cheesemaker. In addition, there was a public school, and the St. Luke church, school, and parsonage.

1893 plat map showing farms, homes, businesses, church, school, cemetery



Notes: The 1890s identification of the building for the blank box is unknown; it is the Frank & Van Haag house. The "Jos. Cramer" shown on the map was the only son of Adam Cramer; the property is at 1070 Main St next to the present-day post office. William Cramer later built a home at 1130 Cedar Street (later John C. and Joseph M. Ruhland, Harrold Schutz, Scott Ring) and Jerry at 1150 Cedar (later Lawrence Beck, Glen Jewell house). Other Cramers lived on farms: Adam had 80 acres; Sol, Sr. 314 acres; Sol., Jr. 120 acres; and Solomon K. 80 acres.

Solomon as land developer

Solomon had occasionally sold off small acreages and parcels of land, but around 1900, he became a developer in earnest. He had land near the village surveyed, laid out lots for business and residential use, and filed a map with Sauk County called "Cramers Platt." This was the first formal sub-division in the village. The plat map appears to be lost, but Cramers Platt is referred to in records of both the Register of Deeds and the Treasurer's Department of Sauk County. On the following page are a few of the entries:

1875	John B. Nachreiner	21sq rods	\$10
1870	Pleasant Hill Cemetery		donated
1878	George Schwartz	6ac	\$90
1881	Joseph Cramer	.43ac	\$50

Illustrative sales of lots in Cramer's Platt

Date	Grantor	Grantee	Description	Price	Source
1891 12 Jan	Sol Cramer	Geo. Schwartz	6 acres	\$90	Plain V60, p. 371
	Geo. Schwartz	Geo. Brey	6 acres	\$2095 ⁶	V60, p.372
1902 18 Feb	Sol Cramer	Michael Paulus	Lot 10, Block One, Cramer's Platt 50' x 140'	\$240	V83, p.391
1902 18 Feb	Sol Cramer	Cramer Bros. and A. Brickl	Lots 1, 2, Block Two, Cramer's Platt	\$550	V83, p.482
1902 18 Feb	Sol Cramer	Alois Brickl	Lots 11, 12, 13, Block One, Cramer's Platt, 3 @ 140' x 50'	\$550	V83, p.481
1902 20 May	Sol Cramer	John R. Ruhland	Lot 2, Block 4, Cramers Platt	\$240	V81, p. 234
1902 20 May	Sol Cramer	John Haas	Lot 14, Block 1, Cramers Platt	\$240	V81, p.235
1904 6 Aug	Sol Cramer	Alois Bauer	Lots 9 and 10 of Block Two, Cramer's Platt (2 @ 100 x 130)	\$525	V86, p.437
1905 17 Apr	Sol Cramer	Cramer Bros. & George Nachreiner	A fraction of Lot 8, Block 1, Cramer's Platt	\$210	V83, p.483
1908 11 Apr	Joseph Cramer et.al.	Pearson W. Cramer	W 1/2, SE 1/4, Sec 6, T9, R4		V1, p. 125
1908 Apr 20	William, Jerry, Wilbert	H.A. Hormuth	5-9-4 140 x432	\$3000	V92, p.236
1908 31 Dec	William Cramer et.al.	Catherine Rick	Sol Cramer farm except for 6 acres and cemetery	\$30,000	V93, p.133
1908 14 Apr	William Cramer et.al.	Jerry Cramer	lot		
1908 8 June	Joseph Cramer	Frantz Nachreiner	80 acres, W 1/2 SE 1/4, Sec 6, T9, R4	\$5700	V92, p.340
1901 3 June	John D. Cramer	Andrew Reuschlein			V47, p.420 V27, p.331
1911 21 Nov	Pearson W. Cramer	Joseph Vorndran	Subdivision		V50, p.86 V51, p.93
1912 5 July	William S. Cramer	Edward Kraemer	Sec 5, T9, R4 100 x 140	\$425	V100, p.128
	John B. Nachreiner	Albert Kraemer	6 acres		

Source: Register of Deeds, Sauk County, *Grantor Index*, C-F, 1843-1915.

Solomon also continued his brick making and carpentry activities. Thering related:

About 1902, Cramer Bros. bought a new brick making machine with a large boiler which weighed over four tons. According to Anton Brickl, an employee, the machine had to be brought to Plain over the big Hollow Road, as it was too heavy to bring over the Hennamon Hill, with road as rough as it was in those days.

Solomon must have known there would be a spurt of building activity to have made this investment. He would know, for example, that his three sons planned to start the Cramer Brothers store:

In the summer of 1902, with the completion of a kiln of 80,000 bricks from the Cramer Brickyard, the Cramer Brothers – Ira, Jerry, William, and Pearson – began the foundation of their new two-story brick building on the corner of Main Street and Alma Avenue (Thering, page 79).

⁶ Note the difference in what Geo. Schwartz sold the property and what he paid for it on the same day (above). A nice \$2005 profit.

He also would have heard about plans for a new Gothic-style Catholic church in Plain:

Some of the bricks came from the brickyard of Cramer Bros. at the price of \$7.00 per thousand. Ninety thousand bricks were brought out from Menomonie, Wisconsin. The cut stones were given by Joseph Blau to the parish from his stone quarry (Thering, p. 159).

About 1905,

*John G. Diehl erected a new cheese factory [Cedar Grove Cheese Factory], due east from the former location, on the Gassner farm. Brick used was made in the **Cramer brickyard** (Thering, p. 48).*

It is likely that many of the brick houses in Plain, Bear Creek, and Spring Green were supplied with brick from Cramers brickyard.

The photo below shows the Solomon Cramer family around the time of the opening of the Cramer Brothers so called "Big Store." The three women on the left are the wife and two daughters of Philip Volk; the two daughters had married William and Jerry Cramer.

Cramer Brothers store, about 1903 showing family members



Maria Elizabeth Josephine William Jerry Ira Pearson Philip Adam
Yoerg Volk Volk Cramer Cramer Cramer Cramer Volk Unknown Cramer
Volk Solomon Cramer, Sr.

Identification by the author based on his knowledge of the family members and family structure.

Solomon Cramer dies

On January 26 at 5:30 pm in the afternoon, Solomon Sr. suffered a heart attack and died. He had been on his way to his daily visit to the Cramer Brothers store. He died from drowning when he had the attack and fell into a ravine. The size of his funeral showed that he was held in great esteem. The *Weekly Home News* recounted:

Friends and relatives, innumerable from all vicinities shared their sympathy with his bereaved, by witnessing the funeral ceremony which took place at the home of the deceased Saturday, June 29th. Rev. Prucia of Spring Green officiating and Misses Lilian and Mary Evans, Laura Sprecher, Rev. Prucia and Frank Simpson singing songs appropriate to the occasion. After the ceremony more than one hundred teams followed the remained mortal of Solomon Cramer to Pleasant Hill cemetery, where he was laid in rest. Source: Weekly Home News, July 12, 1906.

His grave marker is the largest in the Pleasant Hill cemetery (see photo below). There are more Cramers buried there than any other family name.

The beginning of the end of the Cramer Era in Plain

Solomon did not have a succession plan, so his estate went to Probate Court. Rather than keep all the enterprises together, the Cramer brothers decided to sell them at auction in 1908. The farm was sold to Anton Riek, the sawmill and feed mill to sawyer Joeö (Joseph C.) Ruhland, and the brickyard to the auctioneer J. C. Wells.

Solomon, Sr. & Mary Cramer grave, Pleasant Hill Cemetery in Plain



Photo by Gary Haas, 2008

There were only four of Solomon's sons left for the inheritance.⁷ Ira Cramer took his share and headed to South Dakota where he died two years later. William and Jerry continued to run the Cramer Brothers store, and Pearson continued to run the carpenter business. In 1918, they sold Cramer Brothers store to Phillip Bettinger. William built a house (1150 Cedar St.) in Plain and worked in the dray business hauling material for the new St. Luke School. In 1920, he sold his house to Joseph C. Ruhland and moved to

Baraboo where he died in 1943 and was buried in the Catholic section of the Walnut Hill cemetery. Jerry built a house (1160 Cedar St.) in Plain in 1908, worked as a machinist in the Ruhland sawmill and, in 1922, sold the house to Lawrence Beck and moved to Baraboo. Later he moved to Ft. Atkinson where he died in 1957 and was buried in the Lakeview Catholic Cemetery. Around 1910, Pearson moved from Spring Green⁸ to Plain and built a house at 1110 Cedar St.; in 1921, he moved to Wausau near his stepson where he died in 1932 and is buried in St. Joseph Cemetery there. These were three of the four Cramers who turned Catholic because of marriage.

The last Cramer to leave Plain was Joseph Cramer - a nephew of Solomon Cramer. Joseph, the son of Adam Cramer, went to work for Solomon as a farm laborer at the age of 17 and stayed until the farm was sold. We do not know what he did afterwards, but his home is now the home of Luena Repka Ruhland Meister. Joseph moved to Spring Green in 1924 where he died in 1926 and was buried in Pleasant Hill. His wife Josephine Thering is buried in the Old St. Luke Cemetery. It was about 75 years between when the first Cramer entered in the Plain area and when the last Cramer left. Most of the Cramers had moved elsewhere in Sauk County, e.g., Reedsburg, Sauk-Prairie, Baraboo, Lodi.

The Cramer legacy in Plain today

There is little physical evidence that the Cramers were ever in Plain. The two largest buildings, the farm complex and Cramer Brothers Store, are gone as is any physical evidence of the brickyard, the sawmill, or grist mill. Evidence that remains is Pleasant Hill Cemetery, Rings

⁷ By 1892 already, Solomon had lost six of his eleven children: two as babies, his wife Mary Ann at 48 years, and two daughters and two sons in their prime to TB:⁷ 1857 Joseph D. 1y 9m; 1863 Mary L. 4y 1m; 1882 Mary Ann Engel 48y, wife of Solomon; 1889 Emma H. 26y 6m; 1890 Evaline C. 21y 9m; 1891 Solomon, Jr.; 1892 George S. 26y 7m; Caroline Cramer Vorndran died in 1906, the same year as Solomon, Sr., and is buried in the Old St. Luke Cemetery. She had become a Catholic when she married Joseph Vorndran.

⁸ Pearson had worked for his brother, Solomon, Jr., in Spring Green, and when the latter died, Pearson took over the business.

tavern, three former Cramer houses on Cedar Street, Luena Meister's house on Main Street, three brick houses on Clover Street, and unidentified brick houses in the countryside. There is no social or cultural legacy. There are no Cramers living in Plain today. There is not even a photo of Solomon Cramer, Sr., other than the blurred image in the 1903 family photo in front of Cramer Brothers store (page 8). Hopefully, this essay and the larger book on which it is based will demonstrate that their contribution to the Town of Franklin and the Village of Plain is important and to be remembered. We request that any Cramer family members reading this will share photos with the Old Franklin Township Historical Society.

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