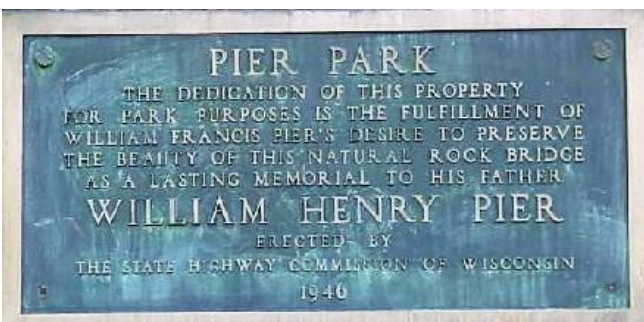




SandHill Marketing photo.

Pier County Park at Rockbridge – State Hwy 80, Rockbridge – 1844 - 1946.



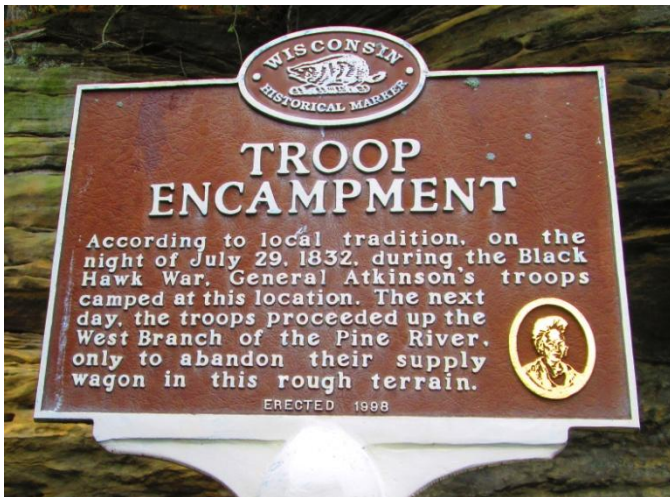
“The dedication for this property for park purposes is the fulfillment of William Francis Pier’s desire to preserve the beauty of the Natural Bridge as a lasting memorial to his father William Henry Pier.”

Pier Natural Bridge Park is located along Hwy. 80 North, at Rockbridge in Richland County. The park obtained its name from the Pier family, who donated the land to Richland County to preserve the site as a park. The site has a very unusual geological feature - a half-mile long "finger" of blocked and layered sandstone rising nearly 60 feet above the flood plain of two merging valleys. This narrow finger is topped by tall pines and covered and other greenery.

The Park has two historical markers - one indicating the unique rock formation and the other recognizing the significance of the Blackhawk Indian wars in this area. The park has a man-made tunnel which allows visitors to walk through the rock formation

to the West Branch of the Pine River. There are also stairs to walk to the top of the rock formation to view the surrounding area. The West Branch of the Pine River meets with the Main Branch underneath this rock formation, which forms a Natural Bridge. This 10-acre county park has 6 campsites, two shelters, picnic tables and grills, play equipment, and pit toilets. Camping permits may be obtained for a minor fee from the Natural Bridge Store, located next to the

park. All camping is on a first-come basis. For additional information, contact the Richland County Parks Commission at 608-647-2100 or the Natural Bridge Store in Rockbridge at 608-647-4673.



The board of supervisors of Richland County, at a session in June, 1850, created the town of Rockbridge, by taking all of townships 11 and 12 north, range one east, which had been previously a part of the town of Richmond, and Rockbridge soon after became a part of the organization of Richland County. The town is bounded on the north by the town of Henrietta, on the east by Willow, while Richland lies on the south and Marshall on the west. Town 12 north, of range 1 east was afterwards organized as the town of Henrietta, which act reduced Rockbridge to its present size.

The surface of the town of Rockbridge is uneven, with hills, rocks and abrupt breaks being common, the scenery is varied

and interesting. Among the more prominent natural features of interest is the rock bridge spanning the Pine River. Immense ledges of rock, forming sometimes a perpendicular wall of great height, rise abruptly from the highway, and springs of water flow from the hills furnishing numerous streams. Formerly this township was abundantly supplied with a heavy growth of excellent timber, but the original forests have been reduced by the ax in the early settlement days until the large pines became scarce.



The original route of County Hwy D west of the village of Rockbridge. Richland County History Room photo.



Samuel Swinehart was the first permanent settler in the town of Rockbridge in 1844 when he made a claim on the present site of the village of Rockbridge and built a log cabin there. He sold this claim to Harry Coles, a resident of Galena, Ill., and in the spring of 1845 the latter gentleman hired some men at Galena to come to the place and build a saw-mill. The names of the men were William Dooley, James Baxter, David Pettie and Mr. McCann, all single men, and David Currie, with his wife and two children. They drove to Muscoda and crossed the river to the town of Orion. The following day, accompanied by Captain Smith and Thomas Matthews, they started to cut a road to Rockbridge. They attempted to follow a ridge and went only a few miles when they found themselves up against a bluff. The party attempted to find a passage, but were unsuccessful. They then left the teams and made the trip by water in "dug-outs." They proceeded up the Wisconsin River to the mouth of the Pine, then up that stream to their destination. It took them a week to make the trip and the mill was not completed for nearly a year. After about four years, Orrin Haseltine and his son Ira came from Waukesha County, and purchased the mill property and some land in that vicinity. Orrin Haseltine made his home there until the time of his death and Ira went on to found the village of Richland Center.

Ira Haseltine. Richland County History Room.



The west side of Pier Natural Bridge Park on CTY Hwy D. SandHill Marketing photo.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LU-ULysFXyc>

Slide show by John Wanserski.