

# Biography of Ira A. Bradford, Plymouth, Wisconsin Founder

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Ira A. Bradford, one of the earliest settlers of Plymouth, Sheboygan County, Wisconsin<sup>1</sup> was born February 27, 1820 in Berkshire, Franklin County, Vermont.<sup>2,3</sup> Ira was the oldest of 11 children of parents, Joseph and Persis Darrah-Bradford<sup>4</sup> whose issue included James Nelson (b. 1822), Mary Ann (b. 1823), Percis (b. circa 1824), Fanny (b. 1825), Arwin Allison (b. 1828), Hiram H. (b. 1830), Loren James (b. 1833), Julia Ann (b. 1834), Hosea (b. circa 1835) and George Washington Bradford (b. 1836).

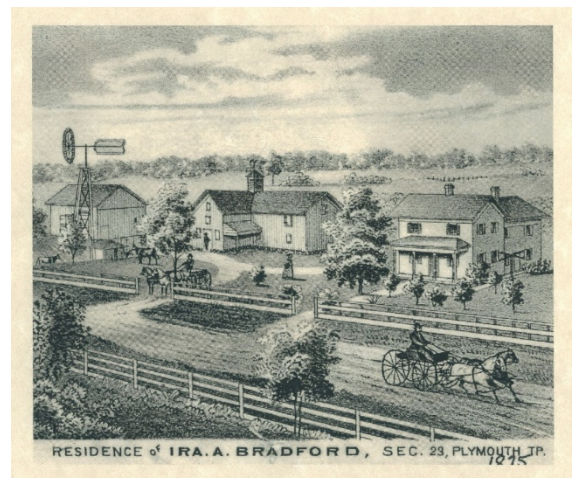
The Bradfords were Loyalists - loyal to England following the Revolutionary War.<sup>5</sup> They may have been compelled to relocate north, nearer to the English controlled Eastern Townships in the Province of Quebec, Canada. Indeed, Berkshire, Vermont is within an easy walk to the Canadian border. Ira's father, Joseph was born c. 1785 possibly in Brattleboro, Windsor County, Vermont and died in Berkshire, Franklin County, Vermont in about 1835.<sup>6</sup> Joseph was reportedly the son of John Bradford,<sup>7,8</sup> and the grandson of Asa Bradford.<sup>9</sup> Joseph had been married first to Susannah Washer (a.k.a., Hannah Eastman) before 1804,<sup>10</sup> and by 1818, the marriage produced five children, all older half-siblings of our Ira: Charlotte (b. 1804), William (b. 1807), Charles (b. 1812), Mary (b. 1816) and John (b. 1818).<sup>11</sup> The dissolution of Joseph's first marriage, whether by death, abandonment or divorce, is unknown. Between 1818 and 1820, Joseph Bradford married his second wife, and Ira's mother, Percis (Percy) Darrah. She was the daughter of Loyalist Arthur (II) and Mary Ann Davidson-Darrah, both originally of Windham, Rockingham Co., New Hampshire<sup>12</sup> who had also relocated to far northern Vermont.

Ira's early life was difficult. Throughout his early teen years he worked his family's hard-scrabble Berkshire farm, but in about 1835, his father was killed by a falling tree.<sup>13</sup> Joseph's death left nearly a dozen young orphans and a widow incapable supporting them. The experience of Ira's younger brother, Arwin Allison Bradford was typical: at age 7, and at the Town's expense, he was taken to the home of Dr. and Mrs. Webster, who never had any children of their own. They were quite exacting, and it was, of course, lonely without other children in the home, but Arwin grew to manhood and was married the day he was 21.<sup>14</sup> Ira's experience is less clear, but at fifteen, he may have been old enough to take-on work and to live independently.

Little is known of Ira Bradford's late teen years, but he may have visited Syracuse, New York for a time, as this was the home of his future wife. This was an era of national expansion, and with the completion of the Erie Canal, opportunities called adventurous souls westward. At the age of 22, Ira was among the canal's early passengers to far-away Lake Erie. Like other pioneers, he then traveled across the Great Lakes by schooner to the eastern shores of the Wisconsin Territory, and thereafter on foot to stake a claim in the wilderness. Ira first came to Sheboygan County in 1841 but only remained a few months when he returned to Syracuse.<sup>15</sup> There he married Miss Sarah G. Sweeting in December 22, 1843.<sup>16</sup> Sarah was born March 9, 1822 in Onondaga County, New York, the third of nine children of Cobb and Dorothy Magdalen Vossberg-Sweeting.

In 1846 Ira and Sarah returned to Sheboygan County and settled on a farm about two and one-half miles Northeast of Plymouth, where they remained until retirement.<sup>17</sup> Ira's 80-acre farm was located in the eastern half of the northwestern quarter of section 23 in Sheboygan County. Ira's son George owned an adjacent 50 acres to the east.<sup>18</sup> By 1992, Ira's farm was owned and occupied by the Bill Heberleins of Plymouth.<sup>19</sup>

Ira and Sarah Bradford had 8 children. Their first-born, Helen (b. circa 1844) does not appear in the 1850 US Census,<sup>20</sup> but George W. (b. 1845), DeWitt A. (b. 1848), Charles Martin (b. 1850), Frank I. (b. 1852), Celia J. (b. 1855), Morton E. (b. 1857) and William N. (b. 1861) all lived to adulthood.<sup>21</sup> All 6 of the Bradford sons were seasonal teachers<sup>22</sup> and they were ardent abolitionists<sup>23</sup> and family legends holds that the family taking-in runaway slaves and assisting them reach safety at the Canadian border.





**Six Sons of Ira A. Bradford**

As the Civil War loomed, 1 in 9 Wisconsin residents (half of eligible voters) served in the army,<sup>24</sup> and the Bradfords of Plymouth, Wisconsin were no exception. With the knowledge that his farm was in the hands of his older sons, Ira Bradford enlisted in the Union Army on 28 Feb 1864.<sup>25</sup> For the times, he was an “elderly” 43, and with him, he took his 15-year-old son, DeWitt as a drummer boy.<sup>26</sup> Ira and DeWitt joined Company E, 36<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry and together they drilled at Camp Randall in Madison before the 36<sup>th</sup> mustered-in.

The 36<sup>th</sup> Regiment saw extensive service in the east, remaining near the nation's capital for the duration of the war. Its service included countering demonstrations, service in the Appomattox campaign and the Battle of Hatcher's Run.<sup>27</sup> Of its original and reinforced complement of 1,024 men, the regiment lost 342 during service. Seven officers and 150 enlisted men were killed. Three officers and 183 enlisted

men died from disease. Though depleted, the remaining men of the 36<sup>th</sup> Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry had the satisfaction of witnessing Confederate General Robert E. Lee surrender at the Appomattox Courthouse as the Civil War drew to a close.<sup>28</sup>

One of Ira's letters from the height of the War was published in *The History of Plymouth*:

We arrived at Washington the night of the 14th of May 1864, tired, hungry and dirty, crowded into a filthy building which had been used for a rebel prison. As it was Sunday, we had two good night's rest on the bare prison floor. Our rations were spoiled pork, fair bread and what was called coffee, though it could not be proven by Co. E. Nothing but bad thoughts about the Colonel. May 16th went by boat down the Potomac to Belleplaine; left a number of our men in Washington sick. 17th, we drew rations of powder and lead, spoiled meat and hard bread, started for the wilderness, marched all day, until two the next morning 18 hours, without rest or refreshment; and it was that style of marching and building breast-works till the first day of June, when four companies of the 36th (Co. E included) made a charge upon rebel works and retreated with a loss of 35 men in each company. I find that June 8th at Cole Harbor, Co. E had 24 men fit for duty. July 22d, Co. E was short 75 men and I was short 75 lbs. of my usual weight; on the 22nd I left the Co. sick; returned to the regiment January 1st, 1865, and staid [sic] till the war was over; returned home July 7, 1865.<sup>29</sup>

Ira Bradford was discharged 27 Jun 1865 and returned as a sergeant.<sup>30</sup> With him, he brought a fellow soldier, Dick Forbes. Forbes was a man who had no recollection of his past, and he spent the rest of his life with Ira and family, working on the farm. Occasionally he would grab up a pitchfork, go out in a field and perform the manual of arms as he had done as a soldier. Dick Forbes is buried on Ira Bradford's lot in Union Cemetery in Plymouth.<sup>31</sup> Ira, his son, DeWitt and Ira's brothers, Hiram and Arwin all survived the conflict.<sup>32</sup>

Ira also returned with a never-ending case of dysentery and a disposition changed for the worst.<sup>33</sup> One family story of Ira's irascible character holds that he disapproved of Pauline Kenter, his son George's second wife. When Ira visited there one time, he called Pauline a "kraut" and she slapped him across the face with a piece of wet wash, and that breach was never healed.<sup>34</sup>



**Sgt. Ira A. Bradford (1820-1895)**

Another letter from Ira to his nephew Charles speaks of weather, farm life and Ira's heartbreak following the death of his youngest son, William (punctuation and capitalization added):

Plymouth, Jan 27<sup>th</sup>, 1884.

Charles Bradford.

In looking over my pocketbook I find a letter from you dated Dec 10-82. [I] received another last week dated Jan 20-84 and now I will take a little time & answer the two. [I] am very glad to hear from you [and] would very much like to see you - also your mother, as your father was a small boy when I left Vt. I have but little recollection how

he looked but always heard a good report of him (in Boston). [T]he man, P.K. Smith got acquainted with him & got the 200 dollars for me. [He] was buried last week [on the] 24<sup>th</sup>. [He] died rich a retired merchant. [W]ell I see I am getting old; was born Feb 27<sup>th</sup> 1820 will be 64 next month have been on this farm 38 years and have 80 acres. [I] had 120 acres but gave George my oldest son 40 acres. [H]e has 80 acres across the road & we work the farm together. [W]e buy our wood and draw it six miles this winter. We keep 32 head cattle, six horses & a few sheep [and] 20 cows [to] sell the milk to [the] cheese factory [plus] raise some calves make some butter [I]n all, [its bring[s] us in nine hundred dollars. [B]esides hogs & grain, all told [we will make] about 15 hundred dollars this year. But wear of machinery & poor hired help at large wages leaves but small profits. 97 dollars of taxes to pay - sometimes more. [W]ell I [also] knock around and do some work yet but cannot work as I used to. [W]e was offered 75 dollars per acre for our farm 160 acres but did not sell. [O]ur land is a good piece in this county but cheaper west & north. I have two sons in Clark County [who] have 80 acres [and] can buy land there for 7 to 8 dollars per acre - wild & heavy timber. Chas. M. & Morton E. Bradford [have] address[es] [at] P.O. Spencer, Marathon Co. Wis. north west 150 miles from here. One son Frank Bradford P.O. address [at] Shopiere, Rock Co., Wis. [Frank] has a wife and one child runs a farm at halves; 160 acres all prairie no timber [to] clear. [He makes] about six hundred a year. Dewitt A Bradford has a wife & one child [and is] Principal of Hartford High School at about nine hundred a year P.O. Hartford, Washington Co., Wis. [I]n regard to farms I refer you to them. [Y]ou will see I am alone here on a farm. [M]y family [is] all gone but a wife, 62 years old & poor health. [M]y youngest Son died May [18]82. [He] was a teacher [and died] at the age of 21 years. [He] had taught 3 years [and] was smart, [but] over done it [with] study & teaching. [He] took to bleeding to the lungs & died in 4 1/2 months. [H]e, Willie is in heaven. I hope to meet him where there is dying & tears are wiped from all faces. I never have tried to get rich like some men but have lived for my family. [I] began very poor have got a good home [and] am worth about six thousand dollars. [I]f I am prudent, it will last me till I go over the river of death. [I] must close soon. Pardon me for not writing before & excuse this poor letter. Please write me when convenient.

[V]ery truly your uncle.

Ira Bradford.

[Addenda squeezed in upside down].

Time was 30 years ago, a young man by strict attention to business could grow up with the country & make property. [B]ut it is no better now than any other old country. Young men are going West and the girls won't marry. Well my best respects to your wife & mother also to your dear Self.

I. A. Bradford.

[B]ut little snow yet. [W]e use sleighs but thin snow drifted badly. [I]t's been] cold 20° to 20° below. [Y]es, [I] did read of the shipwreck you spoke of. I don't hear from Canada relation. Do you? As I am the oldest, my Brothers are all alive as far as I know. [S]o good bye Charles. [W]rite soon.

District Box 27 Plymouth Wis.

I.A.B.

In 1886, Ira (66) and Sarah Bradford (64) sold the farm and moved to the City of Plymouth to live with Alice Mary (Mrs. Charles) Lindvall, a daughter of their son George by his first wife, Ann Breezee.<sup>35</sup>

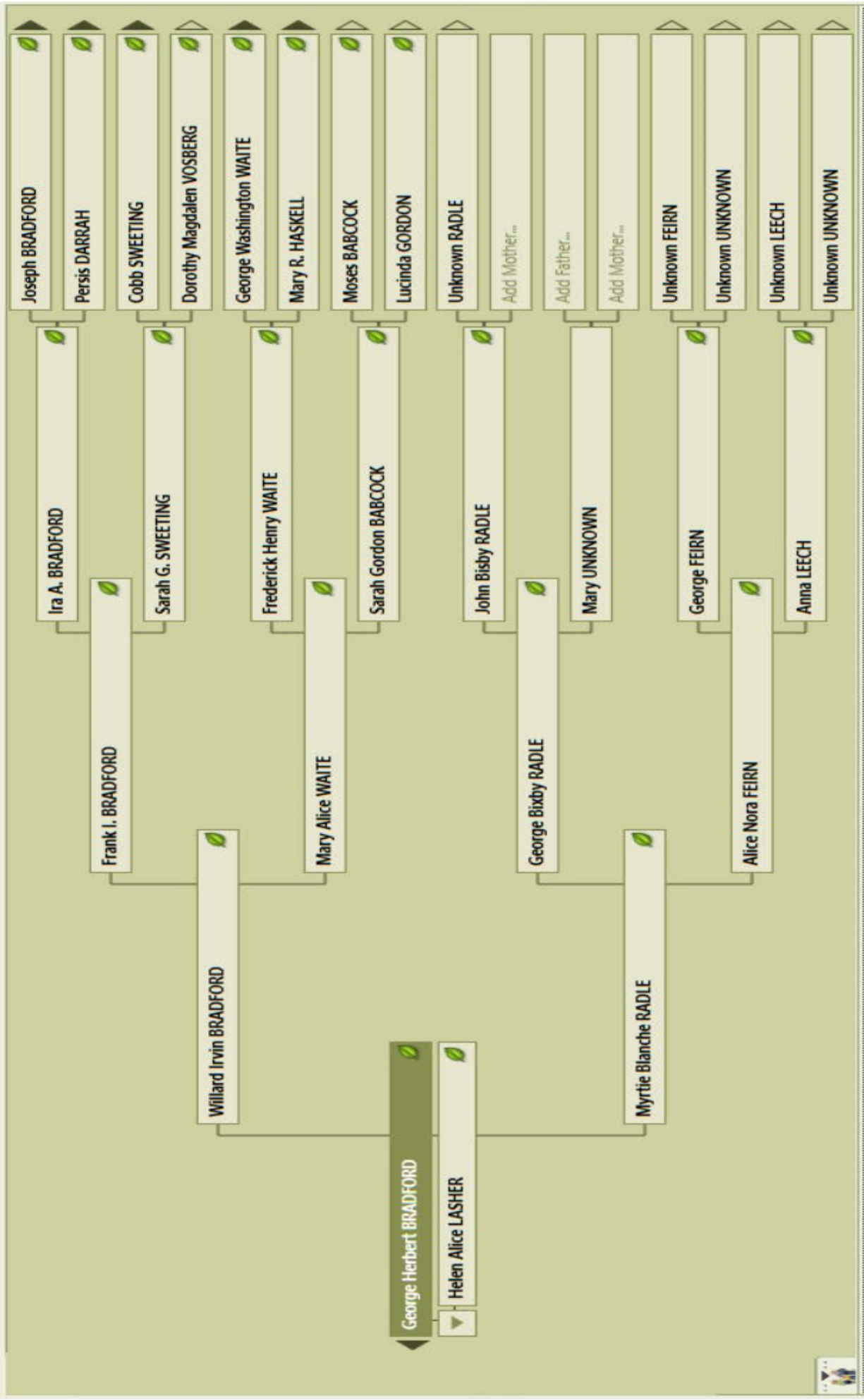


Sarah G. Sweeting-Bradford

Six years later, an ailing Sarah passed away on October 10, 1892<sup>36</sup> only to be followed in three years by her husband, Ira on April 24, 1895.<sup>37</sup> His funeral was from the house and conducted by H. P.

Davidson Post G. A. R. of which he was a member. Ira was buried 2 days later in Section B, row 16, Union Cemetery, Plymouth, Sheboygan Co., WI.<sup>38</sup> Rev. G. B. Hubbard conducted a short service at the house. His son Charles and his brother H. H. Bradford of Iron Mountain, Mich., and his grandsons, Elmer and Willie and granddaughter Alice were present at the funeral.<sup>39</sup>





## FOOTNOTES:

- <sup>1</sup> Biographic History of Clark and Jackson Counties, Wisconsin, 1891 (Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, IL, 1891), State of WI, inter-library loan; Transcribed & posted on Roots Web's Clark Co., WI biography web site, pp. 312-313. BIOGRAPHY of Charles M. BRADFORD.
- <sup>2</sup> The Plymouth Reporter, Plymouth, Sheboygan Co., WI. The clipping is found in the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center in Sheboygan Falls, WI and is hand-annotated: "Wednesday, April 24th, 1895, Ira Bradford."
- <sup>3</sup> History of Northern Wisconsin, pub. Western Historical Co., Chicago, IL, 1881 [reprint: The Ralph W. Secord Press, Iron Mountain, MI, 1988], vol. II, p. 1008. Repository: Janesville [WI] Hedberg Public Library, 977.5 H629n, v.2.
- <sup>4</sup> IBID 3
- <sup>5</sup> Bradford, Minnie Iola, Manuscript: Bradford-English, Minnie Iola, Bradford Recollections (autobiography), Kansas State Historical Museum, Topeka, KS.
- <sup>6</sup> Jean Darrah-McCaw (jmccaw@citenet.net), Genealogist for the Union of Empire Loyalists' Association of Canada (UELAC), Central Region East: Quebec and Ontario east of Toronto, Sir John Johnson Branch, Quebec (other than Montreal) to David Bradford, 12 June 2007
- <sup>7</sup> IBID 5
- <sup>8</sup> Bradford, Winfield Allison (son of Arwin A. Bradford), Manuscript - Ancestors of Arwin A. Bradford on the Event of his 50th Wedding Anniversary, 1899 (Privately published, Glen Elder, Mitchell Co., KS, 1899.), transcribed Mae Canaga, descendant of A.A. Bradford.
- <sup>9</sup> IBID 8
- <sup>10</sup> Ancestry.com, Vermont, Vital Records, 1720-1908 (Provo, UT, USA, Ancestry.com Operations, Inc., 2013), Ancestry.com, p. 52B. Death Index Card record for Charlotte H Bigelow. Birth location: P.Q. [Province of Quebec], Parents identified as Joseph Bradford and Susannah Washer. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=VTVitalRecs&h=1100313&indiv=try>.
- <sup>11</sup> Hyde, Robert G., Family Group Sheet - Bradford, Joseph & wife, Washer, Susannah (Self-Published 22 Feb 2000, 15005 SE 184th St., Renton, WA (received by Fax 28 Apr. 2000), p. 2. Group sheet data supported by VT vital records and US Federal Census records.
- <sup>12</sup> IBID 6
- <sup>13</sup> IBID 5
- <sup>14</sup> IBID 5
- <sup>15</sup> IBID 3
- <sup>16</sup> IBID 3
- <sup>17</sup> IBID 2
- <sup>18</sup> G. A. Randall and Co. / An illustrated historical atlas of Sheboygan County, Wisconsin, (1875), Map of Plymouth township, p. 2
- <sup>19</sup> Hildebrand, Janice (Project Director), The Hearts of Sheboygan County - Sheboygan Falls, Plymouth, Lima and Linden Townships, published by Curtis Media Corporation, Dallas, TX, 1992, family history number F41: BRADFORD - SCHIERECK FAMILY, contributed by Mrs. Harley (Jean) Schiereck-Laack, p. 85 (Milwaukee Public Library # 977.569 H436 v.1 Ref.)
- <sup>20</sup> US Census Bureau, Jackson, Ronald V., Accelerated Indexing, comp., extracted from 1850 US Census Bureau files, US Census - WI, 1850, Plymouth Twp., Sheboygan Co., WI (Ancestry.com, 1999 - [database online]), <http://www.ancestry.com/>, Roll: M432\_1006; Page: 151; Image: 298.
- <sup>21</sup> n.a. (compiled by publisher), Biographic History of Clark and Jackson Counties, Wisconsin, 1891 (Lewis Publishing Company, Chicago, IL, 1891), State of WI, inter-library loan; pp. 312-313.
- <sup>22</sup> IBID 5
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS3355>
- <sup>24</sup> IBID 5
- <sup>25</sup> Thomis, Wm. L., Asst. Surg. - USA[rmy], en chge/, Military Record - Military Service Summary of Ira A. Bradford (date stamped 6 July 1865), NARA, p.1.
- <sup>26</sup> IBID 19
- <sup>27</sup> n.a., Wisconsin Historical Society, "Historical Essay, Civil War: 36<sup>th</sup> Infantry", (URL: [www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS6412](http://www.wisconsinhistory.org/Records/Article/CS6412))
- <sup>28</sup> Smith, H. N., The History of Plymouth, Wisconsin; c.1875, Reproduced for and by The Sheboygan County Historical Research Center [SCHRC], Sheboygan Falls, WI, pp. 108-110, a transcription of which was found in the Mead Public Library, Sheboygan, Sheboygan Co., WI.
- <sup>29</sup> IBID 28
- <sup>30</sup> IBID 25
- <sup>31</sup> IBID 19
- <sup>32</sup> IBID 19
- <sup>33</sup> IBID 19
- <sup>34</sup> IBID 19
- <sup>35</sup> IBID 18
- <sup>36</sup> The Plymouth Reporter newspaper, published in Plymouth, Sheboygan Co., WI. The obituary clipping found in the Sheboygan County Historical Research Center (SCHRC), hand-annotated: "Monday, October 10th, 1892, Mrs. Ira Bradford."
- <sup>37</sup> IBID 2
- <sup>38</sup> National Cemetery Administration, U.S. Veterans Gravesites, ca.1775-2006 (Provo, UT, USA, Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006), [www.ancestry.com](http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=VAcemeteries&h=3719437&indiv=try), Record for Ira A Bradford. <http://search.ancestry.com/cgi-bin/sse.dll?db=VAcemeteries&h=3719437&indiv=try>.
- <sup>39</sup> IBID 2