

# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

the bi-monthly bulletin of the  
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## SWEDISH INFLUX BEGAN in 1852

When the first group of Swedish immigrants came to Rockford in August, 1852, the railroad which is now the Chicago & North Western, did not cross Rock River. The bridge was not completed until 1853.

Therefore the first Swedish group got off on the east bank of Rock River. As other Swedish immigrants followed, they also got off on the east bank of Rock River, where their countrymen had rented rooms or built two-room "shanties" for homes. They settled in the area extending south from E. State St. and mostly between Rock River and Kishwaukee St., later to 7th St. and still later covering the entire east side of the city.

This accounts for the predominance of Swedish families on the east side of the city, in contrast with the few on the west side.

## SCHOOLS STARTED NUMBERS "CRAZE"

Sometimes we become weary of so many numbers in our lives and feel it to be a curse of the automation age, but school numbering goes back to our fundamentals of education.

The Ordinance of 1787 gave the 16th section of each township to that body for purposes of education. These lands were sold at public auction on the steps of our county courthouse. Proceeds were used to purchase convenient sites for the erection of school buildings. Other funds had been utilized to erect existing schoolhouses.

(Continued Page 6)

WE WANT 500 NEW MEMBERS!  
Plan to Attend the  
QUARTERLY MEETING  
Week of April 18th  
and bring a friend  
interested in their  
Home Town

2. Plan to Attend the Quarterly Meeting  
Swedish influx in 1852 (continued)

Most Swedish immigrants in the early 1850s had tickets to Chicago and from there they were sent westward. The railroad came in 1851 to Elgin, St. Charles, Batavia and Geneva and therefore the first Swedish people settled there a year earlier than in Rockford.

It is noteworthy that the Swedish people who came to Rockford built homes for themselves, some of them humble but many quite pretentious. In 1870, S. A. Johnson, one of the newcomers of 1852, built a large two-story frame house at Kishwaukee St. and 3rd Ave. Next year his partner in business, John Erlander, not to be outdone, built an identical house, but of brick at 404 S. 3rd St. It is now the Erlander Home Museum. Mary Erlander, 93, lived in this house for 80 years, turning it over to the Swedish Historical Society in 1951.

It is also noteworthy that the Swedish workmen were not satisfied to work for others but from 1870 to 1890 established more than 20 furniture factories, including the Union Furniture Co., organized in 1876 of which P. A. Peterson, who came to Rockford in the first group in 1852, became secretary, and John Erlander became president. Not to be outdone, S. A. Johnson organized the Central Furniture Co. Organization of the Union Furniture Co. took place in the Erlander home.

When the Union plant was destroyed by fire on the Water Power in 1888, P. A. Peterson moved to a cornfield on 18th Ave. and rebuilt it there, it being the start of the industrialized southeast area of Rockford.

Three of the city's elementary schools are named for Swedish immigrants who were first to come here in 1852. P. A. Peterson School, John Nelson School, named for John Nelson who invented the machine that

We Shall Meet in Home Savings-Loan Bldg.

ACCIDENT AT THE REAPER PLANT

In the days before electricity had been put to use in industry, the machinery in a factory was propelled by belts or bands coming from wheels which were connected directly to the water power at the dam race. To start a machine, instead of pressing a button or flipping a switch, it was necessary to engage a band from a power wheel to the wheel or pulley on the machine. To stop the machine, the band was slipped off.

Accidents would inevitably result occasionally from this procedure, and such a mishap took place in Manny's Reaper Factory in June of 1855. As one of the workmen, whose last name was Morse, tried to remove the band from his machine before going to dinner, the band caught his wrist and crushed his arm about half way to his elbow. The Rock River Democrat of June 19, 1855, stated that his "bones are badly crushed, but it is hoped the arm may be saved." Whether or not his arm was saved was never related, but even if it were, the chances are it was forever mangled; with no workmen's compensation laws in those days, the remaining years for poor Morse were probably not to be envied.

-Robert H. Borden

Swedish Influx (con't).

knit a man's sock automatically, and the Maud E. Johnson School, named for a daughter of S. A. Johnson.

-G. Herman Nelson

President Bill Barrick and family returned from a Florida vacation in time to announce the spring quarterly meeting. Week of April 1855.

*A message  
for you --  
inside* →

4. Why not a Saturday Lecture Course for juniors?

FIRE AT THE REAPER PLANT

On July 14, 1855, the Manny factory had a narrow escape. A corn starch factory had just been completed on the water power, and it was separated from the Manny building by an alley which was approximately fifteen feet wide. The starch factory was completely destroyed by fire on Saturday, July 14, but fortunately the volunteer fire fighters arrived with their buckets in time to prevent the fire from spreading. They climbed to the roof of the Manny plant and kept it soaked with water, thereby preventing a major catastrophe for Rockford. If the Manny building had burned, the others on the water power would have caught fire, too, and according to the Rock River Democrat of July 17, 1855, "...all the manufactories of Rockford would have been swept away in one general conflagration...."

-Robert T. Borden

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Please note that your editorial committee has changed the name and format for size. If you like it as easier reading, please let the editor know.

\* \* \* \* \*

Seventy-seven of the pioneer Swedish immigrants to settle here in 1852 organized what is now the First Lutheran church on Jan. 15, 1854. 'Twas the first church here with a Scandinavian background and the initial congregation of that denomination.

\* \* \*

Mrs. Nielsen will relate an interesting story about a village that "died" near the Iaona Forest Preserve in our next issue.

\* \* \*

5. McHenry Co. Historical got 546 Members in week!

"Rockford-Year by Year" (Continued from our last issue)

1835 - (Continued) The following list of arrivals who followed the Daniel S. Haight family to Midway, or Rocky-ford, included John and James Wood, James Boswell (great-grandfather of Dr. Clarence Boswell), Ephriam Wyman, William Dunbar, John E. Vance, Joseph Jolly, John Caton, Charles Hall, Milton Kilburn, Luke Joslin, Israel Morrill, Don Alonzo Spaulding, Lovia Corey and Adam Keith.

1836 - Winnebago county was formally platted following an act of the legislature in session assembled at Vandalia. Previous to this county act, all land east of Rock river comprising Boone, McHenry, DeKalb and part of Ogle county was known as LaSalle county. All land west of the river - Stephenson, part of Ogle, Carroll and Lee counties was designated as Jo Daviess county.

First elections under new law was held in August with these results: William May, for members of Congress 1st Cong. district; John Turner, for sheriff over four opponents; Daniel Z. Haight, for coroner; Eliphalet Gregory, for commissioner; Thomas B. Talcott, for county surveyor.

1837 - First observance of Fourth of July was held with an attendance of 125 men, women and children. Host Thurston's boiled beef ran out at dinner time and so did the plates and silverware.

Former Governor George Marcy and wife, New York City, were entertained at the Atty. Kemble spacious log house erected in the east side of the river. Kemble had served in the legislature when his guest was chief executive of the Empire state.

(Continued on page 6)

6. We "adlocked" on a name; how do you vote?

"Rockford-Year by Year" (Continued)

1838 - This was a year of much home building and during the early summer word came from Keokuk, Iowa that Chief Black Hawk, famed Sac Indian leader who precipitated the war named after him, had died. The venerable chief was buried in "white man's clothes" given him by Washington, D. C. statesman. Under the "store" suit he wore tribal costume with a headdress of feathers; in his right hand he clutched a cane, gift of Hon. Daniel Webster.

1839 - Frink, Walker & Co. established the first stage route between Chicago and Galena, then a booming zinc mining community of nearly 5,000 souls. Rockford was now the legal name of our town and was the mid-way stop on the stage state route across the state.

1840 - Taverns or eating houses were licensed at \$10 per year. Ferriage rates across Rock River were scheduled as follows: carriage or wagon drawn by two horses, 62½ cts; 1 horse rig, 37½ cts; each footman, 6½ cts; for victualing-meal, 37½ cts; lodging, 12½ cts; oats, a bushel, \$1.25; liquor, per glass, 6¼ cts.

First newspaper, the Rock River Express, was launched and it lasted a week, but 52 weeks.

(To be continued)

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Schools started numbers "craze" (Continued)

Thus began the numbering system in Winnebago county. Each township numbered its school districts beginning with No. 1 up to 8 or 9 in most areas. Each township used numbers determined by their distance north of a specific base line and east of a meridian. Locally School No. 1 in Township 44, Range 2 would be the present Marsh school in what was then Guilford Township. (Now Rockford Township.) See page 7.

7. Jesse Robinson will speak on "A Negro in Rockford"

Schools Started Numbers "Craze" (Continued)

The same system was followed in each of Winnebago county's 16 townships which eventually accounted for 120 common school districts. When lines of communication became clarified and the county school office was more in control, numbering was changed to become consecutive throughout the county. Roscoe Township was designated 46-2; 1st dist. through 9th and 17 and 18. This was in 1900.

A county school map of that period disclosed that our numbering began in the northeast corner of the county with Hayward school being No. 1 and S. Beloit Nos. 2 and 3. Shirley school at the extreme southeast corner of the county became Dist. No. 120. There were exceptions when school districts joined other districts directly across a county line.

Presently one finds numbers higher than 120 which generally indicates a consolidation of several original districts. All 200 numbers indicate high school districts. The smallest number still in use in the county is Rockton Dist. 13 and Stephen Mack school (formerly S. Rockton.)

Presently there are but 17 district numbers under 120 in use. It has been 60 years since the Seward districts consolidated and today there are but 13½ percent of the districts using the original numbered designations. We do have an Illinois county, wherein 92 districts became one consolidated area, a .9 percent reduction.

In the next issue we shall discuss names of schools and their origin rather than numbers.

-Dorisanne H. Nielsen

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