

## NUGGETS OF HISTORY

the bi-monthly bulletin of the  
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

May-June, 1964

Vol. I; No. 4

### Dr. Bean Awards A Legacy of Blake's

President Bill Barrick is in receipt of an interesting offer from Dr. George E. Bean, Little Rock, Ark., offering a valued collection of papers and paintings owned by Thatcher Blake one of two founders of Rockford. The writer, a great-grandson of the pioneer Blake, reported that his father made a trip to this city in 1956, a year before his death in an effort to leave a diary, various papers and several paintings here for keeping in a museum. Dr. Bean added that his parent was unable to find anyone who would store the relics anywhere except in a cellar chest.

He returned south disgusted with the "lack of interest" in preserving these evidences of the 1834 pioneer ancestor. "If your society is sincere," wrote the os-

(Continued Page 2)

### Elton Got lost When Durand Changed mind

While the writer was compiling a history of Winnebago County's country schools, an inquiry was directed to Mrs. Earl Haughton, for information regarding Elton school. Why was the still standing stone school house in the northwest section of the county built so far from the Center road way?

Here are some interesting facts regarding a "lost village" that died over 100 years ago:

"I am very much interested to learn that the records of the old Elton school house are to be preserved I think its history and the disappearing village of this name are most interesting. It began when a group of English im-

(Continued Page 6)

Watch for the Picnic date in early August. And a general, open meeting in July and plan to attend. Bring a new member, folks!

Last Call for Charter Members

July 1, 1964, is the date agreed upon at the last quarterly meeting as the final deadline for charter memberships in the Rockford Historical Society. If you have friends, relatives, or acquaintances whom you believe to be interested, or whom you feel should be interested, try to persuade them to join by July first.

There are many things which the Society can do for our community if we will obtain a large enough membership. There are two principal reasons why a large membership is highly desirable. In the first place, most of the projects which we hope to undertake will require finances, and memberships do, of course, provide some basic revenue. Secondly, and more important, a large membership will bring a wider circulation to our journal, post cards, and other mailings, and probably a greater audience at our programs, thus creating more interest in our activities. We assume that those who are thereby interested in our work will spread the news to others who are not members.

New members will continue to be welcome after the first of July, but they will not be charter members. So if you know of someone who will eventually wish to join, sign them up before the deadline. Dues continue to be five dollars for couples, three dollars for individual adults, and fifty cents for students. And the last quarterly meeting it was decided that people over sixty-five years of age may join for one dollar per year.

Dr. Bean Awards A ....  
(continued)

teopathic physician, "I shall be glad to ship the collection to you, minus the diary which has been lost or destroyed.

(to be continued)

Our Director Hospitalized

Herman G. Nelson, a founder of the Swedish Historical Society and our own Rockford Society, is recovering from a serious illness at Swedish-American hospital.

A cheerful greeting from our associates.

SOMETHING YOU CAN DO FOR THE SOCIETY

Several months ago, the writer snapped a photo of an old mansion at the northwest corner of South First and Grove Streets. A few weeks ago we thought we'd take another look at the historic building, and alas! all that was left was an empty lot. Some boys were using it for a ball field.

Perhaps you have had the same experience. The stately mansions and humble dwellings of yesterday's Rockford are gradually disappearing. As a historical society, is there any role we can play in preserving these landmarks?

Surely we cannot prevent the march of progress, nor would we wish to. We are happy for those historic buildings which continue to be used by their owners, but we are aware that some have outlived their usefulness. What, then, can we do?

Our suggestion is to develop an enormous photographic collection of scenes in Rockford,--homes, stores, factories, streets,--anything which could conceivably change in appearance within the next one hundred years--and that would certainly include everything in our city. Think how interesting it would be to have a collection of pictures thoroughly depicting the Rockford of 1914--fifty years ago. Will not the scenes of today be of value in 2014--fifty years hence? In many instances they would be of immense historic value even five years from now.

One major purpose of a historical society is to make available to future generations the information necessary to develop an understanding of their community. A historical society should be a fountain or storehouse of knowledge for those who would delve into the past.

(to be continued)

JOHN H. MANNY'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE  
DEVELOPMENT OF HARVESTING MACHINERY

The Manny, manufacturer of reapers and mowers, has been alluded to many times by writers relating the early days of Rockford. Probably no history of this community has even been written without at least mentioning it, and many newspaper accounts have referred to the important part Manny and Company played in this city's industrial development.

Throughout our nation the name Manny is no longer connected with reapers in the public's mind. They know about McCormick, who so often is labeled as the inventor of the reaper; and perhaps a few of those who have studied history may have heard of Hussey or Randall. Manny however, has found his way into few if any general history books, and reference to him is usually found only in volumes dealing exclusively with agricultural implements.

For several years John H. Manny was McCormick's foremost rival, and had his inventive genius not been cut short by his untimely death at the age of thirty, it is probable that he would have eventually established an implement enterprise as large and as formidable as the one built by McCormick in Chicago. The history of agricultural machines in this country is not complete without a study of John H. Manny.

To the casual traveler entering Rockford from the south on Illinois Highway Two, the old warehouse and factory district along South Main Street between the Illinois Central and the Chicago and Northwestern Railroads has little meaning. However, if after crossing Kent Creek and the I.C. tracks he would turn eastward on Mill Street and continue to where it joins with Race Street he would find himself in the manufacturing district formerly known as the "Water Power." Proceeding northward on Race Street, he would observe that most of the struc-

(Continued Page 5)

John H. Manny's .... (Continuation)

tures are built of thick stone walls which were common for factory buildings of the middle nineteenth century. At the northern end of the street, he would find the dam which provided the water power for those early industries.

This was the area which was Rockford's first permanent industrial district. Here it was that John H. Manny manufactured his combined reaper and mower which time after time out-performed and often out-sold all of its contemporaries. This was not the usual barnyard reaper shop in which the farm boys would putter in order to build and sell a few machines. For the mid-nineteenth century, this was big business, and the Manny machine was well-known among farmers far and wide.

John H. Manny had originally come from the Mohawk River valley in New York, where he was born in 1825, the son of Pells and Sarah Manny. With his parents he had migrated to Stephenson County, Ill., where his father began farming in 1836 near the town of Waddam's Grove. As was the case with the McCormicks father and son together developed a machine to aid them in their most arduous task, that of harvesting the grain. After their product had gained a widespread reputation, Pells Manny remained in while his son John moved westward to begin an enterprise at Rockford and Freeport.

Few changes occurred in methods of farming from the earliest days of primitive man until well into the nineteenth century. For harvesting grain the ancient sickle, or reaping hook, was almost universally used until the sixteenth century, when it was replaced by the scythe. The only exception during this long period was a machine used in the first century A. D. by the Gauls

## THE VILLAGE THAT GOT LOST

(Continued from Page 1)

migrants forded the Pecatonica rive in the vicinity of the Trask Bridge, and settled there, naming the settlement Elton. They gave as their reason for naming the town site was the fact that the countryside reminded them of their former hokes in rural England. They erected a score of homes of native limestone, on both side of the highway. Directly in front of the old school--now know as "Elton Studio"-- was where our business district was built.

There was a general store, blacksmith shop, cooperage shop, a post office, and a lodge hall above the store building. On the north side of the road. The school was erected in the second block back of Center Road. A long lane led to the school, but this was closed when the building was no longer used as a school... The Milwaukee railroad finally bought the right of way South of the school house, southwest to northwest in direction. The railroad later changed the route to pass through what is now Duran. Then it was when that Medina--another village--through what is now Durand grew, named after St. Paul railroad president. Several Eltonites either moved to Rockford or Durand and entered the manufacturing field. Our early day residents were the families of the Derwent Brothers, Hamiltons, Barninghams, and Haughtons.

(to be continued)



## ROCKFORD-YEAR BY YEAR

(Continued from Last Issue)

1841- The weekly Star, of Democratic leaning, began publication, but didn't last a year...

1842- Germanicus Kent went before county commissioners for purpose of declaring "one Lewis, a Negro, from this date on, is a free person of color, entitled to all rights and privileges of such". The date was March 11th; the incident was freeing of the first slave in Winnebago county.

1843- After five-year discussion, Newton Academy was organized at Belvidere, but lack of funds and friction brought about a change of ownership. Eben Contant and John K. Towner took over the school. The former's son Augustas H. Conant, preached and taught in the academy, but with little success in attracting students.

1844- Thomas Brown, Galena re-elected curcuit Judge, began his second term, while William Hulin assumed post of county commissioner; Anson Barnum, Rockford became sheriff, and Funcan Ferguson, occupied the county surveyer's office. Ephriam Wyman was sworn in as county treasurer.

1845- A mild epidemic of malaria fever, kept Dr. A.M. Catlin so busy he was forced to cap-nap in buggy while trusty horse carried him to and from patients ... Beloit was chosen as the site of a college "for the enlightenment of young people of S. Wisconsin and N. Illinois, when Congregationalist voted to select Beloit.

(to be continued)



"... we shall pay any price...  
to assure the survival and the  
success of liberty."

JOHN F. KENNEDY  
May 29, 1917 Nov. 22,  
1963.

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