

NUGGETS of HISTORY

The Bi-Monthly Bulletin of the
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

September-October, 1964

Volume I, No. 6

WHEN A PRESIDENT CAME TO TOWN



The time was June of 1903, the place - - I. C. depot, the visitor ---- President Theodore Roosevelt. Minutes after photo was snapped, the President dedicated Memorial Hall. In welcoming group were J. B. Whitehead and Mayor Chas. Jackson, (in "stove pipe hat").

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NEW BOARD ACTS - President Barrick played host to fifteen members of the new directorate of the society on the evening of October 15, when plans for 1964-65 were discussed and recorded. The 15 in attendance announced plans for three

general or open meetings at which well-known speakers will address the group. As far as possible these sessions will follow the seasons. Next meeting will dip into the winter season and will be in early December.

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ARTISTRY DISPLAYED at the Ford Museum
- Herman G. Nelson

A Rockford - made clock shelf from the Erlander Home Museum, 404 S. 3rd St. is currently in the northwest territory exhibit at the Henry Ford Museum, Dearborn, Michigan.

It was selected by curators of the Henry Ford Museum on a Rockford visit as most representatives of Rockford wood carving from the late 1800s. It is one of 600 carefully selected items from the six-state area which comprised the Northwest Territory.

It was made by Robert Baugh in 1870 with the carved initials of J. E. fro John Erlander. Baugh was a wood carver and furniture designer and is credited with originating the combination bookcase and writing desk of which Rockford furniture factories sold over 1,000,000 in several decades. Baugh was employed by Central Furniture Co. and this factory made the first of this new piece of furniture. Baugh had been challenged by Charles Cohoes, salesman for Central, to create something new. When still alive Baugh recalled: "I was sitting down with a pencil in my hand sketching something, when all at once the idea came to me to combine a bookcase and writing desk. I made a rough sketch and turned out the first model." It became the most popular item of furniture ever made because it supplied a need in every home. Trainloads of the bookcase-writing desks were shipped out of Rockford every week. It helped make Rockford known as a furniture city on a national scale. When popularity of the bookcase-wriging desk began to wane, Rockford turned out the combination buffet-china closet. In the 1880s and 1890s the combination bookcase and writing desk were priced from \$6.50 to \$60 with the \$17.50 type made by Union Furniture Co. being one of the most popular.

Mary Erlander, daughter of John Erlander, recalled just before her 94th birthday (observed Oct. 6) that Baugh made two of the clock shelves, one for her father and the other for his partner in business, S. A. Johnson, who had built his home in 1870 at Kishwaukee St. and 3rd Avenue. When Erlander built his home in 1871, it was identical to that of Johnson's, except that the Erlander home was made of brick.

Central Furniture Co. was organized in 1879. Union Furniture Co. was organized in 1876. Baugh worked for both factories. Later in life he was

with West End Furniture Co. and the Tower Studio in Faust Hotel. Arthur Haggstrom and Paul Abramson were partners with Baugh in the Tower Studio.

When Baugh joined Central Furniture, he was made superintendent without power to discharge. Since all the workmen were stockholders, Baugh often had difficulty getting the men to obey his orders. "I had to fight with my fists to make them obey," Baugh recalled. Once, he had to face the directors for hitting a man and the decision was that Baugh was to shake hands with the man he had hit and ask forgiveness. He recalled: "Holy cats, I god mad. I shook my fist in the face of every one of the directors and defied them to make me carry out the order." Three years later Baugh was given the power to discharge the men under him.

"I'm sure Mr. Baugh would have been very proud to have known that the shelf he made for father would be exhibited at the Henry Ford Museum," Miss Erlander commented when told it.

THE JOHN MANNY REAPER STORY - Chapter Three
by Robert H. Borden

For the harvest of 1848 the Mannys purchased a second Esterly machine, and with the two headers they harvested about six hundred acres of grain. In the PRAIRIE FARMER for October, 1848, John Manny wrote that with three horses propelling the machine, two teams and wagons, and five men, it had been possible to cut and handle two acres of grain per hour. He said that from his two years' experience he believed the heading method was the correct principle of harvesting grain, and that he considered the straw left on the land to be worth at least a dollar an acre to the soil.

Early history and biographical collections either fail to mention Esterly at all in connection with the Mannys, or else imply that they found his machine entirely inadequate and had to completely rebuild it before it would work satisfactorily. Manny's testimonial in the PRAIRIE FARMER does not substantiate this claim, but rather he said, "Esterly's harvester

is simple in its operation, built in a good substantial manner, will last a great number of years, and pay for itself every year..." The report quoted above was dated at Waddam's Grove, Ill., August 21, 1848, although it did not appear in the PRAIRIE FARMER until the October issue. At the end of the letter a paragraph was added which leads one to believe that Manny had already, in August of 1848, decided to manufacture a machine of his own in spite of the praise he had for Esterly's. In that paragraph he set forth a proposition: to anyone who was skeptical of his claims for the Wisconsin-made header, he would pay a dollar a bushel for every bushel of grain which the harvester would leave on the ground; also he would pay "ten dollars per bushel over ten that sprouts in the stack. Said grain shall be threshed by the 1st of January, 1850; and for every bushel over ten that cannot be threshed I will give ten dollars per bushel".

This was an entirely unilateral offer in which no competition or consideration was asked; it was only necessary to issue the challenge. There appears to be no record that anyone took him up on it, but it seems unlikely that Manny would have made such an offer on behalf of another man's product without some ulterior motive. He was apparently either being paid by Esterly to make the offer, or, as is more likely, he was already planning to manufacture his own machine for the coming harvest, and this was a way of getting some advance advertising. John and his father had probably already begun to make the necessary changes in Esterly's machine so as to be able to call it their own.

WHY NOT ROCKFORD, WISCONSIN? - by Hazel M. Hyde

The famed Northwest Ordinance gave such liberal terms that settlers came in ever increasing numbers to Northwest Territory. Thus, for Ill. July 13, 1789, became a fateful day, since it was one of the five states carved from the Northwest Territory. Ohio, Indiana, Michigan, Wisconsin, and part of Minnesota were the other subdivisions of the parcel. Illinois Territory was

created in 1809 and statehood came in 1818. Wisconsin was to wait until 1848 to become a state.

Elias Kent Kane was the leading member of the constitution convention that wrote the Illinois Constitution. An integral part of the constitution was the specification of the boundaries for the new state. Three boundaries had been settled. The peace treaties of 1763 and 1783 made the Mississippi River the western limit. The Ohio River on the South was established as the boundary by the Ordinance of 1787 and Kentucky Statehood. The western demarcation was set by the Ordinance and by the statehood of Indiana.

The northern boundary was expected to be a continuation of the northern boundary of Indiana. Rockford and all the two northern tiers of the state would have been part of Wisconsin. Nathaniel Pope, the territorial delegate to Congress succeeded in getting the boundary set at 42° 30' north. This gave to Illinois the land that includes Chicago and Rockford. All controversy over the northern boundary was forever quieted when President Monroe signed the Act of Admission, Dec. 3, 1818, to make Illinois the twenty-first state and incidentally to make our city Rockford, Illinois, not Rockford, Wisconsin.

BRICE SHEETS PROGRAM CHAIRMAN -- Directors named our assistant chef at picnics, Brice Sheets, as program chairman for the current year. He will have the cooperation of Mrs. Blanche Alden and others in arranging the general sessions and 1965 picnic.

Ye olde editor "Old Man Ages" of the Morning Mail and Post was appointed publications chairman for a second year.

HOW ABOUT HOME GROUP MEETINGS? Several fine suggestions to build up greater interest among our membership were broached at the successful

September picnic. Among these was a proposal to form home groups of from 10 to 15 members and friends to meet in homes for discussion and coffee party evening sessions. To date there have been two offers to entertain at group monthly meetings.

THERE MUST BE A WAY TO GO H O M E !

With 576 manufacturing institutions in Rockford and a score of "big business" firms in Loves Park, there must be interest in preserving historical records.

So saith a dozen society leaders at various times during the past two years. Why not launch a home group to sound out the merits of ascertaining how and where to seek financial assistance in acquiring a permanent home and museum.

Freeport, Madison, Janesville and Woodstock have found the way; why not Rockford?

Mrs. W. Wallace Smith, Rock River Apartments, is an eager beaver member of a group compiling a list of old families of our county.

ROCKFORD - Year by Year (continued from last issue)

1852 - Willard Wheeler was elected the first mayor of Rockford, following receipt of city charter from Springfield. The first Roman Catholic Church was launched following pronouncement of first mass by the Rev. Fr. John A. Hempseton, Chicago, the previous December. It was St. James Parish and there were 15 charter members.

1853 - The church edifice at S. Church and Green Streets, later known as the "House of Worship of Many Faiths" was occupied by the newly launched 2nd Congregational Church. It had housed Unitarians, Universalists, 1st Presbyterian congregations in years previous to 1853. In the 1880s the group that became St. Paul's German

Lutheran congregation, used the building for a dozen services.

1854 - J. W. Briggs and A. C. Spafford launched a private banking firm on East State that became the present First National Bank. Dr. George Haskell name first president of the Rockford Agricultural Society, forerunner of the Winnebago County Fair Association. First immigrants from Sweden arrived by train to East Rockford (the terminus of the new railroad being built between Chicago and Freeport) amidst worst plague epidemic in history. A third of their number died of cholera ere they had been here for a month.

1855 - The famous patent infringement suit instituted against the John H. Manny Co., was filed in Federal Court by Cyrus H. McCormick. It brought Abraham Lincoln to this city as one of the defense attorneys. Manny won the case, but worry over the outcome caused the reaper inventor to succumb a few months afterward realizing little benefits from the internationally popular agricultural machinery. (See Robert Borden's chapter on another page of this issue.)

1856 - The murder of Sheriff John F. Taylor by Alfred Countryman, a prisoner being escorted to the county jail, caused formation of a posse of volunteers that captured the criminal in a grove a mile west of the city. (He was tried, convicted and sentenced to hang March 27, 1857.)

1857 - The Commercial block, S. Main and Elm St., was completed. Leased as a hotel, the Chick House following Civil War. (Building still standing and occupied by Parrish Dress Shop, Rockford Office Supply and the Elms Hotel.

1858 - Elias Cospers, who forsook the role of banker to wear the uniform of an army major in the War of the Rebellion, crystallized interest among a dozen business men to organize a public library. (To be continued next issue.)

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