

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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the

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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BOOSTERS PUBLISHED A  
TWO-VOLUME HISTORY OF  
ROCKFORD BACK IN 1901

Way back when our town had a population of 31,051 (1900 census) a dozen civic-minded members of the Rockford New England Society financed the printing of a 2-volume history of the city and county. The services of gifted historian Charles A. Church were sought and secured. Mr. Church, an early day publisher of a religious weekly here, and editorial writer on the Register-Gazette and author of several booklets, had toiled for nearly a decade in compiling his literary work. Expense of publication was too heavy a financial burden for the historian until Atty. Arthur H. Frost, later a circuit, and officers of the pioneer New Englander group underwrote the project. The text covers the first settlement in Winnebago county to the election

of Abraham Lincoln in Volume I; incidents of interest; a complete listing of municipal and county officials and chronological items of catastrophes, crime, election activities, etc. from 1860 through 1900 in Volume 2. Church compiled another history of county and city for a high pressure Chicago "racket" firm. Historian Church received less than a thousand dollars for four years of research. Unbeknown to the author, a "biographical" section of 600 pages of "prominent" Illinoisans netted publishers some fifty to 60,000 simoleons. If a bereaved widow cared to have complete story of hubby's career \$100 to \$200 was extracted gently. If Gus Olson or Tom Jones were proud of their factory job or saloon he could pay fifty to 75 dollars for a wordy paragraph of a "famous" citizen.

This year the Rockford Historical Society would like to publish

the first Rockford History compiled since 1916. Should you know of anyone interested, a call to Brice Sheets will give particulars of the proposed 350-page illustrated history and year-to-year chronology.

#### WINNEBAGO COUNTY SOUGHT TO ANNEX TO WISCONSIN

Between 1818 and 1845 Winnebago County was prominent in a movement to secede from the state of Illinois for the purpose of annexation to Wisconsin. The secession sentiment covered the period immediately after admission of Illinois as a state and the admission of Wisconsin to statehood. This time span of around thirty years witnessed widespread agitation which sometimes became bitter.

A copy of official proceedings of a mass meeting in Rockford held July 6, 1840, was brought to light in 1899. This meeting purported to represent the northern fourteen counties. The delegates were instructed to instigate proceedings for secession from Illinois. They were to investigate means of annexation to the proposed new state.

The apparent motive was to re-establish the boundary line as originally set up between the two states that might be established from the Northwest Territory. It was north of an east-and-west line running through the southerly bend of Lake Michigan. Many claimed this line had been unfairly extended fifty miles north when Illinois became a state.

There was little community of interest existing between the northern and the southern areas of Illinois. The settlers in the northern sector were principally from New England and New York. The southern part of the state was settled by emigrants from the slave holding states of the South. There was a conflict of interest and a lack of mutual understanding.

The northern counties also wished to escape the burden of the enormous state debt occasioned by the building of the Illinois and

Michigan Canal. There was a feeling that Southern Illinois dominated state affairs.  
- Hazel M. Hyde

#### FOREST CITY COMMEMORATIVE STAMP MAY BE ISSUED

Members of the Rockford Historical Society have taken the initiative in seeking the issuance of a Forest City commemorative special issue postage stamp to mark one of several unusual "first".

Letters to Illinois' two distinguished US Senators, Dirksen and Douglas, and to Congressman John B. Anderson, brought interest and a promise to assist in interesting postal authorities. Local boosters of the project may draft a petition to the Postmaster-General, enumerating several reasons why Rockford rates a "Jim Farley special". Among the incidents listed will be: the 100th anniversary of the formation of the first "Junior" baseball nine launched in this country. Albert G. Spaulding, aged 15, pitched his team to a near-victory against the Pioneers, a local semi-pro club, on July 17, 1865. Secondly, the first high school band in the United States was launched here in 1907 by John T. Haight, who is feted annually by an alumni class. In addition, Rockford High School boasts of an unchallenged record of having graduated eight nationally famous general officers or admirals in our military service.

The Rockford Historical Society believes the time has come to tell the world about records and achievements; how about it?

- Ash Johnson

#### HAVE YOU SENT IN YOUR 1965 MEMBERSHIP DUES?

Don't wait for a second notice in the drive for 1965 membership! Merely write a

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check for a five spot, mail it pronto to Chairman Bob Borden - Robert H. to be formal - and receive a membership card for your wife and self. Your interest in preserving historical records of our city and county will soon save enough postage fees with which to add a bit to the permanent HOME FUND! There must be 200 copy mailings to earn the reduced postage rate for "Non Profit Organization".

**SITE OF EARLY FERRY**

Germanicus Kent established a ferry at what is now State Street. The ferry was the first mode of transit unless one chose to ford Rock River. Special acts of legislature established ferries. The licenses for conducting ferries were under the jurisdiction of the commissioners courts in organized counties. In the September, 1836 session of this court Mr. Kent was authorized to set up and maintain a ferry for the benefit of persons wishing to transport produce and merchandise or merely make the crossing in comfort. The license fee was ten dollars a year. Rates of ferriage were also fixed.

The license was extended for another year in 1837. In the following year a license was issued to Kent and Brinckerhoff to operate the ferry. The rates of ferriage were raised and the license fee changed to twenty dollars a year. Selden M. Church succeeded these gentlemen and continued to operate the business until the first bridge was built.

- Hazel M. Hyde

Ever glimpse an 1861-built hotel in a "gold rush" town? Picture of the Fallon House and theatre, now used by collegian from University of the Pacific summer playhouse troupe.



Home of Burt M. Allen, former mayor of Rockford, in the process of being torn down. See page 7 for complete story.

## CALIFORNIA MINING TOWN RESTORED

For those who have not found opportunity to inspect a California mining town more than 100 years old, the photo on page 5 is an interesting study in restoration of a boom California community of 1851-65. The town is named Columbia and is located about 100 miles northeast of San Francisco, in Tuolumne County.

Though never a real ghost town, Columbia shrank from a population of five to six thousand souls in 1854 to about 500 when the state legislature converted it into a state park preserve in 1948. Repair of some dozen of the best preserved buildings, and restoration of sixteen blocks by checking old photographs, followed. The state parks and recreation commission has expended more than two million dollars in creating an atmosphere of the 1850's. And further appropriations will result in restoration of the nation's most famous mecca for "Forty-niners" and those who followed them to the gold rush country. More than eighty-seven million dollars in gold were taken from the famed Mother Lode in ten years. This fact was attested to by Wells-Fargo Express records of gold purchased there from miners at the prevailing rate of fifteen to twenty dollars per ounce.

When your editor's party made inquiry whether records of claims had been preserved, the information clerk at the museum building reported that she was told they were in Washington, D.C. Claims of the late Andrew Ashton and his partner, and that of Abel George Pickrell, Sycamore resident, were the cause of the inquiry. The latter was a grandfather of Kelsey Whittemore, former Rockfordite. Miner Ashton was our own grandfather, who made his "grub stake" pay off handsomely when he launched a dry goods store in Durand in 1858-59. Mr. Ashton moved his business to Rockford in 1876 when he acquired the site where the Rockford Dry Goods store is now located, following the sug-

## OUR PROGRAM COMMITTEE IS BUSY PLANNING

gestion that Marshall Field made to him.

Museum tours, visiting the 1858-built Firehouse and lunching at the Kruse restaurant are interesting stops along the 16-block area.

- W. Ashton Johnson

## BURT ALLEN HOME MAKES WAY FOR PROGRESS

The home of Rockford's thirtieth mayor, Burt M. Allen, no longer dominates the landscape at 1344 East State Street. Shown on page 5 in the process of being razed, the home was built shortly before 1900 by Charles Ritchie, a brick and plastering contractor. Allen lived there for a time before his marriage, and moved in again after Ritchie's death. For several years it has been occupied by the Barrick Chiropractic Clinic.

Allen served one two-year term as mayor, from 1927 to 1929; he did not run for re-election. During his term the Jefferson bridge was completed, and the way cleared for the widening of Wyman Street. Rockford's worst tornado occurred during his administration, killing fourteen people.

Allen was in business with Will Burns in the early 1900's, and later had his own successful ice cream company.

- Robert H. Borden

## WHO WAS ELKA SMITH?

In an old book found in an attic was this old paper: To Whom It May Concern:

This is to certify that Elka Smith was a member in good standing of Washington Engine Company No. 2 from July 2nd, 1872 till January 7th, 1876.

F. H. Brooks

En. Sec'y W.E.Co. No. 2

Apparently this was a Rockford man. No one seems to know if there was a Washington Engine Company as a part of an early fire department. If you can solve this puzzle, contact Mrs. Hazel M. Hyde, 1523 Burton Street.

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(Non-Profit Organization)

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