

NUGGETS of HISTORY

The Bi-Monthly Bulletin of the
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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SET SPRING QUARTERLY AS MEMORIAL -

Paying homage to military men who served during the brief, but disease-ridden Spanish American War, the Rockford Historical Society has scheduled a May 26th open meeting. The Home Savings & Loan Assoc. - Heritage Room will be the place - 8 p.m. the hour and all interested in local history are cordially invited.

Guest of honor will be Mrs. Violet King, 1325 Elm Street, who is a past Illinois Dept., U.S.W.V. Auxiliary Executive. Mrs. King, widow of Frank King, last of Co. H, 3rd Ill. Infantry, has been active in organization of the local unit and an untiring worker for more than 60 years.

She will make a brief response to President W. H. Barrick's introduction and will read a message from Major Richard Boyer, one of the few living officers of the 3rd Illinois

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ORNATE LANDMARK RETAINS BEAUTY

Built by Major Elias Cospers about 1867, the above home is presently occupied by Dr. and Mrs. W. J. Bryan. Located at 1121 Cospers Place, it overlooks one of the most picturesque scenes in Rockford.

Mr. and Mrs. Cospers' first home in Rockford was a beautiful residence on South Main at about the present location of the Illinois Central Railroad yard. They purchased it from Rev. Lansing Porter,

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MAY 26TH OPEN MEETING HONORS U.S.W.V. --
National Guards Regiment.

The second feature of the spring meeting will be an address by Attorney Philip Johnson, who has made four pilgrimages to centennial observances of Civil War days. The local attorney and his sons have relived history from such famous battlefields as Gettysburg, Vicksburg and at Appomattox Courthouse, scene of General Robert E. Lee to Illinois' U. S. Grant.

There is never an admission charge to the society's open meetings, but annual memberships are available to all history enthusiasts at \$3.00 or \$5.00 for man and wife. Now bring your neighbor along!

Vice President Brice Sheets has charge of the meeting and reports that coffee will be served following the program.

COSPER HOME -

first pastor of the Second Congregational Church and later sold it to S. C. Withrow. They also owned a home on the corner of Green and West Streets, which they sold to Rev. Augustus H. Conant, pastor of the Unitarian Church in 1857.

Mr. and Mrs. Cosper moved to Rockford in 1854, after living five years in Chicago. They were originally from Ohio. Mr. Cosper joined the banking firm of Robertson, Coleman and Company, which later became the Winnebago National Bank. He remained there until September 4, 1862, when he enlisted as a first lieutenant in the 74th Illinois Infantry; he was promoted to captain almost immediately.

Captain Cosper participated in several battles of the Civil War and after the battle of

Chickamauga he was appointed paymaster, with the rank of major. He served to the end of the war in that capacity.

Soon after the Civil War ended, Major Cosper, together with T. D. Robertson, Melancthon Star and John P. Manny, organized the John P. Manny Reaper Company. He later sold his interests in that firm to participate in the establishment of the Rockford Tack Company, of which he became secretary and treasurer.

Major Cosper was sometimes referred to as "the father of the public library" in Rockford. He was a member of its board of directors for more than twenty years, and spent much time soliciting subscriptions for the library. He died on October 12, 1900, at the age of 76.

- Robert H. Borden

MISS MARGARET NORTON, retired Illinois archivist, is a 1965 member and may be persuaded to contribute another article for the next NUGGETS of HISTORY issue. She has resided in Springfield since retiring from over 25 years of service to our state.

The DeWitt (Dewey) Bennetts, 3rd generation of Rockford pioneers, have moved to Florida, in the heart of the citrus country.

Member Harold R. Grahn has presented a World War I document of interest to the rare book section of Rockford Library --- "top secret" official copy of Gen. John J. Pershing's "General Orders" file he found in 1919 at Camp Grant.

History has a queer habit of marching on many years before some curious minds "discover" a pertinent fact or experience that belongs in a text book or biographical volume.

1965 MEMBERSHIP LIST - is your name here?

Mr. Clarence J. Agnew
 Mr. Alf O. Ahlstrand
 Miss Evelyn M. Anderson
 Mr. & Mrs. Gunnard Anderson
 Miss Mary C. Anderson
 Miss Faith Armstrong
 Mrs. Aubrey T. Barnes
 Mr. & Mrs. William H. Barrick
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Mrs. W. Wallace Smith
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 Dr. Maude Swits Stowell
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 Mr. & Mrs. Harley Swanson
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 Mrs. Theodora Van De Mark
 Mr. & Mrs. Adolph Vogel
 Mrs. J. J. Wahl
 Mr. & Mrs. Martin R. Wall
 Mr. Dave Witcher
 Miss Emma C. Lundgren
 Mr. & Mrs. Loren M. Smith
 Mr. & Mrs. Stanton K. Smith

 If you bring in a new member
 we soon can pass the 300 mark!

If your neighbor says "no",
 ask another local or Loves
 Park friend. One of them may
 be waiting to be invited.

Membership Chairman "Bob"
 Borden will see that new mem-
 bers are acknowledged and
 mailed a 1965 identification
 card.

Your Society needs members
 first and then --- let's
 look for a home!

PUBLIC LIBRARY'S MODEST BEGINNING - Hazel M. Hyde

The first successful effort to establish a public circulating library for Rockford began in March, 1857. At that time a canvas was made to collect money for the project. By October 14, 1858, more than six thousand dollars was pledged by public spirited citizens. The library was housed on the third floor of Robertson-Colman Company building. The person chosen as librarian was William L. Rowland. (The name of Mr. Rowland was associated in later years with one of Rockford's branch libraries.)

Interest in a circulating library declined during the Civil War. In 1865 Robert Tinker purchased most of the books when the reading rooms closed.

Rockford is said to have been the first city to establish a library when the Illinois legislature passed a bill providing for a tax to support public libraries in 1872. The city council passed an enabling ordinance June 17, 1872. There were no funds to start and maintain a library but citizens started a subscription drive. Major Cosper was so active that he has been called "Father of the Library". Books were purchased and the new reading room was opened August 1, 1872, in the Wallach block. William L. Rowland was engaged as librarian.

After much correspondence, O. F. Barbour received a letter from Andrew Carnegie that stated he would allocate \$60,000 for Rockford's library. The site for the library cost \$11,000 of which \$2,000 was a gift from the Rockford Gas, Light and Coke Company.

Plans for the Carnegie library were drawn by Bradley & Carpenter and the contract for building was awarded to W. H. Cook. Robert L. Tinker planned the landscaping. November 21, 1903 was official opening day with Jane P. Hubbell named as head librarian.

ROCKFORD HOSPITAL IS ORGANIZED ... State certification of Rockford Hospital Association was issued December 5, 1883. Dr. W. H. Fitch and Dr. F. H. Kimball had led the movement in the fall of 1883. A meeting was held January 29, 1884 to effect a temporary organization. William Brown was chairman and William H. Talcott served as secretary. The first board of trustees was made up of William A. Talcott, William Brown, William Lathrop, N. C. Thompson, R. P. Lane, H. H. Carpenter, Adeline E. Emerson and Mary H. Penfield. The property of Dr. W. H. Fitch on South Court Street was the site purchased for the hospital which opened October 1, 1885. Money was raised by a campaign for public donations. The first patient on the records was accepted October 10 of that year. The first matron was Mrs. Martha J. Smith. A new addition facing Chestnut Street was made in 1887. An operating room was provided in 1901 by Mrs. Adeline E. Emerson in memory of her son, Ralph, Jr. Mr. and Mrs. Emerson made a further gift in April of 1913, which made possible the erection of a six-story addition.

- Hazel M. Hyde

1834 ROCKFORD - year to year 1964

1876 - The upsurge of Rockford industries had resulted in expansion of W.F. & John Barnes foot and power lathes; Amos Woodward's governor factory; the Rockford Silver Plate Co., the Rockford Watch Co., during the preceding 4 years and the Rockford Standard Furniture Co. The city council finally voted down a petition for private ownership of Rockford water system after 4 years of tabling the issue.

1877 - Tragedy marked the construction of Winnebago county's new court house when the multi-ton dome collapsed, carrying nine workmen to their death. The date was May 11. New specifications were drawn and the building was finally

completed at a cost of \$211,000 a year later.

1878 - Daniel Dow's modern store and office building was erected in the 100 block on S. Main (original building reinforced is now a part of the D.J.Stewart & Co.). Three major business blocks were under construction along East State St.: Pyng building at 3-6-08; Van Zant block, corner E. State and N. Second Sts., and the Mrs. Winnefred Nash's brick store structure at 418 E. State.

Rockford Historical Society
(Non-Profit Organization)

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