

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

The Bi-Monthly Bulletin of the  
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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## Sheets Calls for New "MEMBER DRIVE"

The home pictured below at 1313 East State Street is an especially historic one, having been the residence of two outstanding Rockford pioneers. Built about 1873 by John H. Lake, it served as his dwelling until he died in 1907, and beginning about 1919 it was the home of Mr. and Mrs. P. A. Peterson. It would be a fine thing for Rockford if this man-



sion could be preserved as a historic site where future generations of Rockford residents could learn more about their city past. John Lake, born (Continued on page 3)

## NEW ADMINISTRATION -

Brice H. Sheets was named president while ye Editor was tendered honorary executive post at the annual election meeting. Other officers chosen were Robert Borden, 1st



vice president, Chandler Miller, 2nd (Continued on page 2)

The home pictured above was built by G. D. Roper after moving gas stove works here before the "Gay Nineties". Located at 1031-33 Franklin Pl., occupied by Anne E. Dobler and Olive Kniese.

## PRE-HOLIDAY PARLEY LOADED WITH TRAVEL SLIDES!

vice president; Jesse L. Robinson, 3rd vice president; Faith Armstrong, Secretary; and Harry L. Andreen, Treasurer. Elected or re-named to the board of directors for 3-year terms were Mrs. Blanche Alden, Johnson, Emma Lundgren, Mrs. Martin Wall, Barrick, Arthur Huenkemeier, Sen. Bertil Rosander and Mrs. Hazel Mortimer Hyde.

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## THE PRESIDENT'S SAY SO ...

Fellow-members: Let me assure you that this honor and responsibility imposed on me will be uppermost in my mind throughout my term of office. Carrying out the plan of growth of my predecessors I aspire to direct it with this schedule in mind:

- 1) Stress immediate need of making the "every-member-get-a-member" project a reality;
- 2) Establish dates of 4 quarterly open meetings featuring topical programs - in December, March, May and the outdoor picnic; indoor schedule mailed you soon;
- 3) Develop group meetings studying pioneer settler ancestry, arranging markers for unmarked historic sites and visitation of nearby museums and society headquarters, and
- 4) Preside at regular board sessions to be held in October, November, March, May and June specifically.

By this plan, I believe, we can establish a closer members relationship and instill active interest among many more individual affiliates than has been accomplished during the past organization years. May I ask for your continued support?

- Brice H. Sheets

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Art Huenkmeier, membership chairman, picked up several new memberships at the fall picnic ('twas summer then and a beautiful day).

## EVER KNOW THE FIRST FLAG SALUTE WAS A ROCKFORD "FIRST"?

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March 27, 1821, in Selworthy Parish, England, came to Rockford in 1837 at the age of sixteen. After working for three years on a farm and a year as a carpenter's apprentice, he became a carpenter and contractor. In the winter of 1852-53 he formed a partnership with Phineas Howes in the lumber business. Their yard was located where the old Chicago and Northwestern east side passenger depot was later built. In August of 1853 the first railroad bridge was completed across the river and the firm of Howes and Lake then moved to the west side, near the present Northwestern freight depot. They sold out in 1856. Howes and Lake began another lumber business in the spring of 1857 on the southeast corner of East State and Third Streets. This partnership was dissolved in 1859, and from 1860 to 1868 Lake was a partner with Henry Fisher on the west side. In the spring of 1868 Lake again located at East State and South Third, this time in partnership with Seely Perry. While Perry continued at the same site, Lake withdrew in 1874, and concentrated his efforts on the Rockford Fire Insurance Company, of which he was vice president from its organization in 1866 until 1886, when he became its president. He served in that capacity until about 1900. From 1873 until 1883 Mr. Lake was an alderman from the second ward. He died on December 4, 1907.

Pehr August Peterson was born in Wing, Vester-gotland, Sweden, and was brought by his parents to the Rockford area in 1852. They located on a farm near Cherry Valley, where Peterson remained throughout his boyhood. At the age of 27, P. A. Peterson entered a business college in Rockford, and when, in March, 1876, a group of Swedish workmen founded the Union Furniture Company, he was made the secretary, being the only one among them who understood bookkeeping. This was the first step in his

LOOK FOR YOUR MEETING AND PROGRAM SCHEDULES  
IN THE MAIL

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business career, and during the succeeding years, as one company after another was organized by the Swedes, in most instances Peterson was one of the promoters and became one of the officers.

In 1914 the city directory lists 18 Rockford manufacturing factories in which Peterson held an administrative office, as president of fifteen firms, vice president of another and secretary-treasurer of a third. Among the companies active in our manufacturing circles today that were headed by P. A. Peterson are: Rockford Life Insurance Co., Rockford Cabinet, Mechanics Furniture Co., Rockford Drop Forge, National Lock Co., Mechanics Machine Co. and Rockford Standard Furniture Co.. For many years Peterson lived at 513 Catlin Street. The 1894-95 city directory, however, listed him at 619 Catlin, as did the next two directories. In 1899 he was listed at 612 Catlin and for the next 3 years he lived at 1617 South Fifth Street. On April 8, 1903, Peterson married Ida May Anderson of Marinette, Wisconsin. They lived at 1212 Charles Street until about 1909, then moved to 1219 Seventh Street where they resided for about ten years before moving to the Lake Mansion on East State Street. P. A. Peterson died on June 9, 1927, but Mrs. Peterson continued to live at 1313 East State until she died on June 26, 1964.

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PICNIC ENJOYED ON SINNISSIPPI FRONT LAWN -

Despite several conflicts with longer established organizations, 75 members -some with their families of youngsters- enjoyed the third annual picnic at Sinnissippi Park on September 19th. A come-and-get-it buffet dinner was followed by a brief program and election of new officers for 1965-66. Bill Barrick presided until recommendations of the

WE WALKED BEFORE WE RAN, BUT LET'S "HUP-HUP"  
A BIT FASTER.

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nominating committee brought election of the slate by acclamation. Brice H. Sheets, 3025 East State Street, acting president, during his predecessor's European jaunt, succeeds the local attorney. Sheets is a third generation Winnebago county resident. His paternal grandfather, the Rev. F. D. Sheets, was a Methodist-Episcopalian district head for a term and was pastor at Court St. Church here. His father, R. W. Sheets, headed the silver plate factory that bore his name before retirement. On his mother's side, Mrs. Aileen Henry Sheets, the family tree dates back to 1850's when C. F. Henry's parents were among the pioneer immigrants from Germany. Brice and Mary Jane Sheets are parents of five children, two sons and three daughters, two of these being twins who still reside at home.

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FIRST BRIDGE SITE SHOULD BE MARKED ... There should be little trouble experienced in obtaining permission for planting of a base and appropriate marker on the site of the first dam built across Rock River back in 1851-52. The city of Rockford deeded it to the park board long years ago. Its location is along the Waterworks Park shore line in front of the library river-front lawn.

Failure marked the efforts of the old Rockford Hydraulic & Mfg. Co. in 1844 and to its successor corporation, due to ice gorges and high water in the spring. The two first brush and wooden-anchored dams built caused water power firms using them for machine operation in mills, malleable iron works and foundries many thousands of dollars.

The indomitable spirit of the early day Rockford manufacturers was an example of the determination of the transplanted New Englanders and the Scandinavian immigrants who fol-



NEWCOMERS MAY GET "NUGGETS" ISSUE AT C. OF C.  
RACK

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lowed them here in 1852-53. Both failures in following Rockton's footsteps by harnessing Rockford river's water power, built the power race along the east bank of the stream. When the wrecked second dam went out in 1846, officials formed a second company to utilize the west side of the river for constructing the mill race. This time backers abandoned the old site above State Street and engineers decided on a damsite near the old ferry site, where rock bottom replaced the silt and mud stream above.

Arrival of John H. Manny from Stephenson County gave local manufacturers an impetus to complete the water power race immediately. This was the beginning of Rockford's water power area manufacturing operation ... the start of our city's leadership in making and marketing world sold merchandise.

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ROCKFORD - YEAR BY YEAR: 1834 - 1964

1885 - Rockford Hospital Association was formed and its officers purchased the Dr. W. H. Fitch property at South Court near Chestnut Street as the first hospital site. Memorial services were held for Illinois' adopted son-ex-President Ulysses S. Grant and an overflow mass meeting turned out for memorial rites for General John A. Logan. James Ferguson, founder of the abstract firm of Holland, Ferguson and Company died in Florida.

1886 - Most disastrous fire in city's history destroyed six factories and warehouses and six dwellings near the Northwestern Railroad tracks. Loss totaled over \$1000,000. New high school on South Madison Street was dedicated on March 18th. Its cost was \$18,000.

1887 - A third ward alderman, W. B. Reynolds,

WHY NOT WRITE US ABOUT YOUR EARLY DAY RELICS?

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became so interested in circus operation that he launched one of his own after two years of rehearsals and week-long trial tours. It was famous until the panic years. Eugene Debs, world-known reactionary socialist candidate for presidency in later years, addressed a crowd of 2,000 at the Fairgrounds. Labor Day was observed here for the first time. Rockford Standard Furniture Company opened for business.

1888 - J. Stanley Browne, former New York state legislator, who came west to acquire the "Rockford Journal" sold his plant and joined local organizers of a morning sheet 'The Star'.

1889 - The Swedish Building & Loan Association first of its kind, opened its doors on East State Street with S. A. Johnson named as president. Lyon P. Ross, P. Ross, aggressive furniture factory executive, died on February 23rd. He had been credited with being responsible for gaining consent of Illinois Central Railroad to divert their tracks so that our growing furniture industry could be better served.

1890 - D. J. Stewart & Company, occupied their new dry goods store building on South Main Street that was designed by C. W. Bradley. The Third National Bank opened its doors in their new home, East State Street at First Street.

(Continued in next issue.)

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Our town is spreading fast toward the east and so are many other communities -- growing in an easterly direction. Know why??

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(Non-Profit Organization)  
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Col. "Teddy" Roosevelt greeted  
by Maj. Gen. Thomas H. Barry, Comm.  
Frank Jaycox, U.S.W.V., Fisher  
Post (rt. rear) at Camp Grant,  
October 7, 1917