

NUGGETS of HISTORY

The Bi-Monthly Bulletin of the
ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

March-April, 1966

Volume 3, Number 3

VICTORIAN VIEWS

by Jayne E. Borden

"Nothing is so dangerous as being too modern.
One is apt to grow old-fashioned quite suddenly."
- Oscar Wilde

Rockford displays many fine examples of Victorian architecture which may be viewed simply by driving through the older sections of the city that have not yet been touched by changing times.

Queen Victoria's long reign in England, beginning in 1837 and lasting until 1901, spanned the approximate time of architectural styling that is grouped together into one category bearing her name. During this age there was scarcely a style that had not been adapted to the whims of each individual builder. The work

(Continued on Page 2)



The Gothic Style home of Seely Perry which stood at the northwest corner of Grove and South First Streets.

of Victorian architects has been the target of much criticism with words such as "grim, glum, forbidding, and sinister" describing these buildings. Many homes have been in a state of decay for so long, it is no wonder that they earned such descriptions. They were viewed with contempt until recently when more people have begun to recognize their value as a symbol of their time, reflecting individuality and non-conformity.

Victorian architecture is an expression of an era which was overdone in practically every way. It is in harmony with the elaborate clothes, fancy furniture, loud music, flowery speeches, and thundering sermons of nineteenth century America. During this time it boasted cupolas, towers, cornices, spires, balconies, spacious porches, scrollwork, parlors, marble fireplaces, and an array of halls and stairways, all contributing to the lavish and commodious living of the "Age of Gingerbread." Local carpenters and lumber mills worked out their own ornate designs that were cut out with a scroll saw worked by a foot treadle or driven by steam. The very same scrolls and curlicues are found in Victorian ironwork, in patterns for needlework, and even in handwriting flourishes.

Gothic style homes, popular since the 1830's, have steep pointed gables, and arched windows and doors, all accenting the heavenward theme. Carpenter Gothic is the wooden version of those made of stone or brick, often with vertical siding.

The Italian Villa home was in vogue from about 1830 until the advent of the Civil War. These high, wide, and handsome houses were not at all gloomy or fussy, and though this period is brief, we may still see some fine examples. The interior plans are informal, featuring bay windows and sliding doors, while the exterior consists of blocks and wings together with a tower and wide overhangs. Another distinctive type of this style is cube-shaped with an ornamental cupola atop a flat roof, sometimes crested with iron railings.

A French architect, Francois Mansart, developed the type of roof known as "Mansard" which was very popular in the United States from the late eighteenth fifties until the middle seventies when it went out of fashion quite suddenly. It was designed to provide more headroom and light in the attic by having steep sides with dormer windows. The Mansard took many shapes: its slope could be straight, concave, convex, or an "S" curve, with rectangular, pointed, or rounded dormer windows. A Mansard house was "handsome without and comfortable within."



A typical Mansard house still standing at 1401 Clifton Avenue.

Homes built during the 1800's are being destroyed by the thousands throughout the country as well as in Rockford, to be replaced by highways, apartments, office buildings, or parking lots. Progress is admirable, but it would be a shame if some of these venerable old houses were not preserved as samples of a special era in the history of America.



The chair and sofa shown here are in the library of historic Tinker Cottage, 411 Kent Street. They are said to have been used by Abraham Lincoln when he visited the home of John H. Manny in Rockford (see article below). Manny's widow married Robert Tinker in 1870.

LINCOLN'S INSPIRATION by George C. Lawson

In the summer of 1855 Abraham Lincoln sat on a Rockford riverbank discussing a legal case with John H. Manny. Mr. Lincoln was a guest at Manny's home while he was preparing for the trial in Cincinnati, Ohio, in which Cyrus McCormick had charged Manny with manufacturing reapers like those on which McCormick had patents.

Mr. Manny had decided to have Peter Watson, who was his patent attorney, handle the case.

Ralph Emerson, a partner of Manny who had previously studied law, recommended Abraham Lincoln to both Mr. Watson and Manny, but Mr. Watson was more impressed by an eastern lawyer by the name of Edwin Stanton. Mr. Manny's other consulting lawyer was George Harding. McCormick had chosen E. N. Dickerson and Reverdy Johnson to argue his case in the hearing.

On September 20, 1855, the court trial began at Cincinnati, Ohio, before Supreme Court Justice McLean and Judge Drummond of the United States Circuit Court. The opening speech of the trial was made by McCormick's attorney, Mr. Dickerson, stating that Manny & Co. had infringed upon the fourth and fifth specifications of McCormick's reaper patents which had been patented in 1845. The answer of the defense was that improvements had been invented

(Continued on next page)



Building which until recently stood on the southwest corner of Jefferson and North Third Streets. Said to have been one of the Buildings built by Daniel Shaw Haight, first resident on the east side of Rockford. As Haight's other buildings had been razed previously, this was probably the last one left.

and they were patented.

As the course of the trial went on, Lincoln was a little disappointed because he had prepared a whole manuscript for the Manny side, but he had not been allowed to say one word in the trial. Also, Mr. Stanton, who was a strict man in his language, his dress, and his actions, noticed Mr. Lincoln in Cincinnati wearing heavy boots, a linen duster, and very loose fitting clothes; with all of this, Edwin Stanton said that he would not associate with Mr. Lincoln in the trial. In spite of his bad treatment, however, Lincoln still recognized Stanton, as a fine lawyer.

The trial lasted about two weeks, but the decision of the court was not given until January 16, 1856. The case was thorough and long, and after it was over one of the judges claimed that he could not remember a trial as long as this one in all the years he had been on the bench. Since the results of the trial had not been given until 1856 after Mr. Manny had died of tuberculosis, he never found out that he had won his case; nor did he ever know that this case inspired Abraham Lincoln to study harder to become a better informed lawyer such as the eastern lawyers, who were better educated for trial duty.



The University Club at 945 North Main Street, formerly the home of Harry Forbes. (See article on page 7.)

A DINNER SETS OFF HISTORICAL RESEARCH by Hazel M. Hyde

"This house must have a history" said the diners at a dinner party at University Club, 945 North Main Street. With only the name "Forbes" as a clue, research began. Harry Forbes, connected with Gunite, was listed in a city directory as living there in 1894. His previous address was given as 427 North Main Street.

Duncan Forbes started the D. Forbes and Sons Foundry about 1852. The growth of farm machinery business caused this firm to turn to the production of malleable iron castings to meet the farm machinery manufacturers' demand for castings.

This was the forerunner of Rockford Malleable Iron Works from about the year 1854. In 1904 the officers of this concern were H. F. Forbes, president; W. A. Forbes, vice pres.; G. O. Forbes, treasurer. These men were grandsons of Duncan Forbes, and were all born in Rockford. In December, 1904, Rockford Malleable Iron Works gave employment to 225 people. It covered an entire block and was located on the C.B. & Q. and C. & N.W. Railways. There were four buildings in all, including the foundry, annealing room, power plant, and office room.

The Peoples Bank was incorporated about 1873 by a special act of the General Assembly of Illinois. It was capitalized at \$125,000. Presidents included, among others, Harry F. Forbes and A. D. Forbes. In September, 1931, Illinois National Bank and Trust Company acquired the building.

Harry Forbes' residence was pictured in an old edition of the Rockford Newspapers, and the present appearance of the house is startlingly like the old picture. The house on North Main Street does indeed have many connections with Rockford history.

NUGGETS of HISTORY
Bi-Monthly Bulletin of
The Rockford Historical Society
President: Brice H. Sheets
Editor: Robert H. Borden
Bulletin Address:
1325 Cospers Avenue
Rockford, Ill. 61107