

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY

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A SERIES OF STUDENT WRITINGS

Students of Washington Junior High School in Mrs. Hazel M. Hyde's United States history class have become adept in spotting and in photographing old houses. We are offering to our NUGGETS readers some of these student writings in a series. One of our newest student members, John Tallacksen, will lead off with a story of an old house that most of us have seen many times.

THE HOUSE THAT LEACH BUILT By John Tallacksen

Many times when people are looking for something of historical value, they go far out of their way to find it. Such was the case with me. I was looking for one of the older houses in Rockford, and I never thought to look right under my nose. But when I did, I found the perfect house a little more than a mile away from my own home. This house is on the Pinehurst Farms.

The land on which the house is located was
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originally one hundred sixty acres. It was first homesteaded by Mr. Leach in the 1820's. He owned all of the land from the Farms north to the Illinois Central tracks. Later, Mr. Gibson bought the house, and in 1913 he sold it to Mr. Charles Brantingham. Mr. Roger Welsh ran the farm between the years 1916 to 1918, and Mr. John Rankin operated it until September 30, 1947. And now Mr. Hugh Powell has charge of the farm.

The main section of the house was built in 1837. The lumber used was brought from Chicago by ox team. Of course, there had to be payment for the lumber, so an agreement was made whereby three loads of grain sent to Chicago would purchase one load of lumber. It took two weeks to make the trip. The east wing of the residence was added about 1870, and the west wing was built in 1889. The living room was made out of three rooms in 1918. The area which now comprises the kitchen was originally the chicken house and wood shed, and the present dining room was the kitchen and dining room together. The front bookroom was formerly a small parlor. A ladder was used to get to the second floor. The walls of the home are almost fifteen inches thick, of solid stone, and the floors are supported with hand hewn oak beams.

A few trees and the stone wall surrounding the house also have historical value. Two Juniper trees in front of the house are cuttings from trees behind the Great Wall of China. They were brought here in 1918. The stone wall surrounding the home was built of stones in 1865; the stones were quarried just north of the Leigh Frisbie home.

The main highway from Chicago to Galena passed in front of the stone wall, and it is said that Abraham Lincoln spent one night on the farm.

ANNUAL PICNIC MEETING TO BE AT ALPINE PARK ON SEPTEMBER 18

Members of the Rockford Historical Society are asked to mark September 18 on their calendars. President Brice Sheets announces that he has reserved the Alpine Park pavillion and surrounding area for our annual picnic meeting. Dinner will be served at one o'clock, to be followed by a program and the election of officers for the coming year. Past president William Barrick and his nominating committee are working on the slate of officers. Our annual picnics are always enjoyed by all who attend. You will be receiving more information about it as the time draws near.

ROCKFORD'S P. A. PETERSON

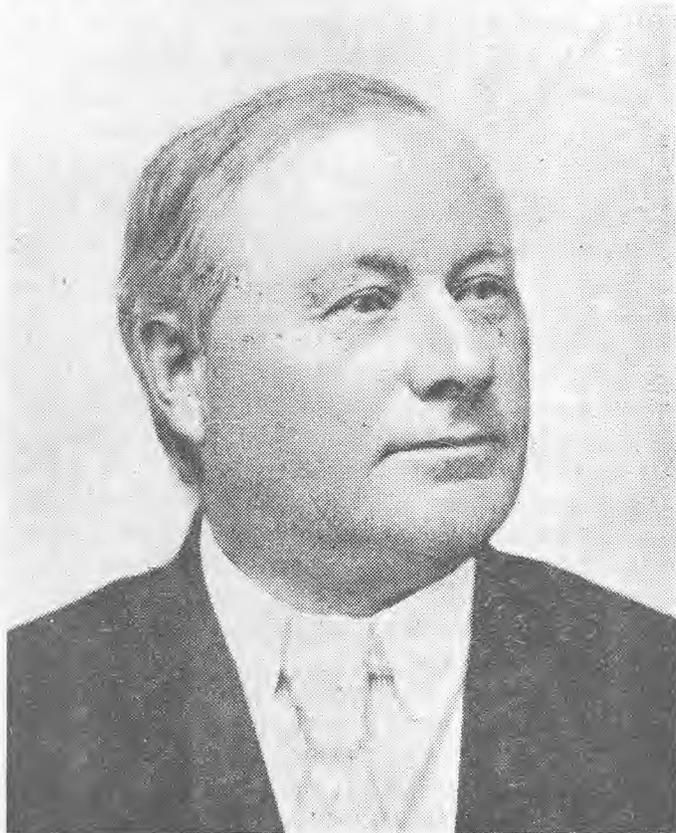
By Ruth Ann Cash, Washington Junior High Sch.
(Reprinted from ILLINOIS JUNIOR HISTORIAN MAGAZINE, October, 1955)

If you had seen a tall energetic man of Swedish appearance striding rapidly down the streets of Rockford in the 1890's, with a long light-colored duster flying out behind him, you would have known he was P. A. Peterson. He rose from a poor boy who carried his shoes to save leather when he walked the seven miles from Cherry Valley into Rockford, to a wealthy business-man and philanthropist who left a fortune of several million dollars. It is a fascinating story.

Pehr August Peterson was born in Sweden on September 8, 1846, and came to this country with his parents in 1852. They moved westward and finally settled in Rockford, where they lived in the second house north of the Jefferson Street Bridge on North Madison Street. But shortly they moved to a small farm near Cherry Valley. It was stocked only with a team of

horses, a cow, and a few chickens. Young Peterson and his mother did the farm work while his father was employed as a tailor in Rockford.

When the family moved back to Rockford, Peterson took a business college course. His first job was with an insurance agent, but he soon quit to help organize the Union Furniture Company in 1876. The company was co-operatively owned by the employees. Peterson, because of his knowledge of bookkeeping, became secretary of the concern. During the next few years he organized more co-operatively owned



PEHR AUGUST PETERSON

furniture factories and became a stockholder in all of them. Peterson advertised for woodworkers in Sweden and financed their transportation to Rockford. The city soon developed into an important center of furniture manufacture.

The co-operatives failed in the financial panic of 1893, but "P.A." -- as Peterson was now known to everyone -- continued to organize companies in other fields. When he died on June 9, 1927, Peterson was a stockholder or director in more than fifty Rockford firms. He willed large sums of money to the Y.M.C.A., foreign missions, and the P.A. Peterson Home for the Aged.

(From interviews from John Anderson, nephew of P.A. Peterson and Herman G. Nelson.)

EARLY EDUCATION IN CHERRY VALLEY

By Lenore Docter

The early settlers of Cherry Valley were not slow in providing adequate educational facilities for their children.

It was only a little over ten years from the time the first settlers forded the Kishwaukee River and settled in the pleasant wooded valley until the first school was built. This was in 1848, - one hundred and eighteen years ago. The building was located on the west side of the river as this was where most of the homes were located. The early desks were tables and the children sat around them. A big, round stove in the center of the room gave heat from the burning logs that had been cut from the near-by trees. During the school day the water pail and dipper were passed so each child could get a drink. This building was known as the Brown School. Some of the early teachers were Adeline Hale, Charlotte Hayden, Louise Hayden, Peggy Gordan and Mrs.

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Marshal Pitchard.

The village grew and with its growth came the need for more school rooms. A new school was built on the east side of the river near the location of the present ball park. This became known as the White School. The children attended here until they finished third grade; they then transferred to Brown School on the west side of the river.

Almost twenty years later the residents of Cherry Valley voted to build an \$18,000 brick schoolhouse to accommodate all the grades. The people on each side of the river naturally thought that theirs would be the best place for the new building. Long discussions followed until at last it was decided to build on the site where the present school stands.

By September 1, 1869, the building had progressed far enough so that three rooms were available for use.

Miss Mary Dietz was the first principal. She held the position for several years. Mrs. C. Case and Miss Hattie Johnson were the other teachers.

Gradually the fine red brick building was completed and the rooms were put into use. The third floor boasted a fine auditorium and stage where school programs and graduations were held. The new school building became an important factor in the development of the town and was for years the pride of Northern Illinois. The last of this building was removed in 1961 when the present school building was completed.

(See picture on page eight)

WANTED: BOOK "FRONTIER LIFE" CIRCA 1856

The Central figure in the famous mural, "Freedom of the Press" on the wall of the Tribune Tower in Chicago, is one Colonel Lyon, an Irish rebel who reached New England as a

bond servant. The price for him was one pair of steers. In following the historic adventures of this man, we find his daughter Elizabeth married Dr. John Roe. The Roe family moved to Rockford in 1856.

Elizabeth Roe wrote a book about 1856 entitled FRONTIER LIFE in which she stated that she and her husband hoped "... to enjoy social and religious life in our declining years, as we have battled long with frontier life."

The Roe family left Rockford to return to Ogle County, near Oregon, where they were living previously in 1835. Their house there was known as Light House and they are buried in the Light House churchyard.

(Continued on next page.)

FOREST CITY TREES

By Vera Dell Jacobson

(Written about 1953)

They called it Forest City
And it was rightly named;
Its giant trees, magnificent
O'er all the land were famed.

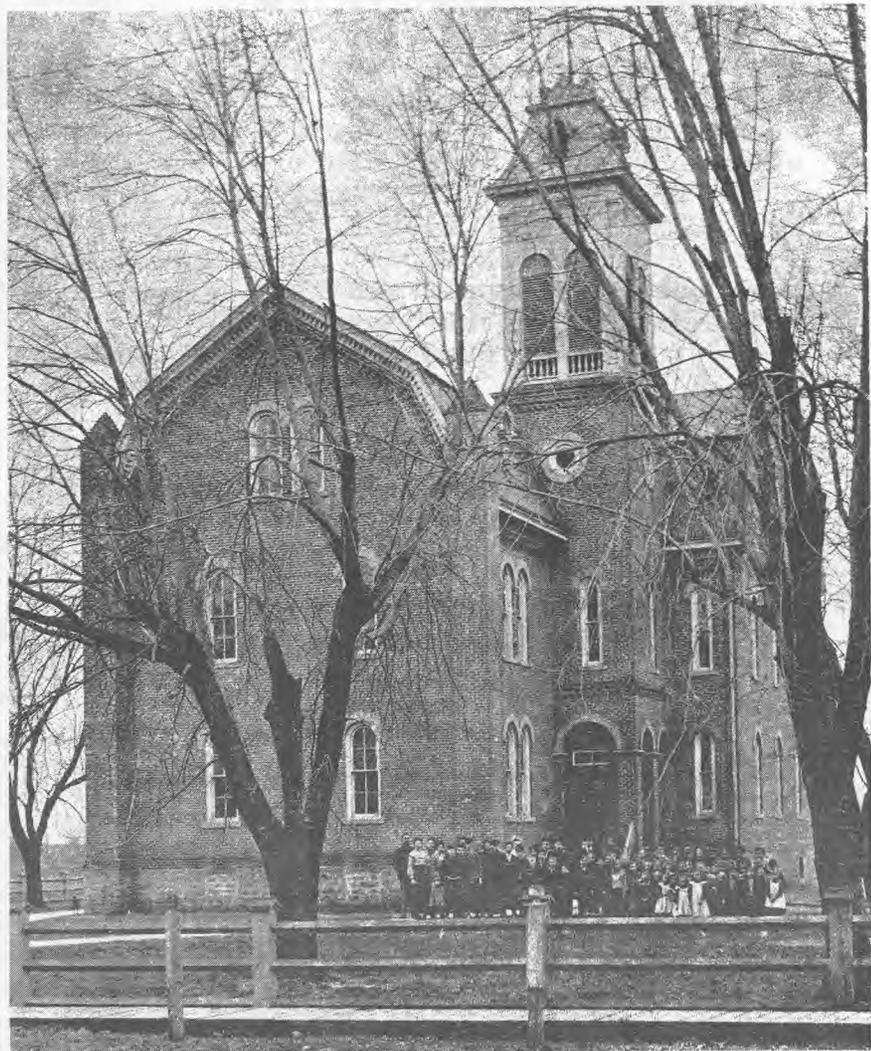
But yesterday I strode along
On Montague and Main -
The trees that I so long had loved
Were felled and cruelly slain -

The lonely streets were stark and wide -
Could I believe my eyes?
My heart was torn within me
And I heard only sighs -

No branches waved a welcome,
No leaves to whisper low ...
Must "progress" kill what years have wrought?
Must strength and beauty go?

The book would be valuable as a first hand account of the activities of this area.

-- Hazel M. Hyde



Cherry Valley School in 1903

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