

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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WHAT IT WAS LIKE THEN---CENTERVILLE SCHOOL

By Mary Johnson

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

It must have been grand in the days when our parents went to school. They tell of all the fun they had! The particular school in which these gay times occurred is the former Centerville School, which is located on Centerville Road at the intersection with Montague Road.

The school has now been converted into a house, but it once held a room full of eager students. The first through eighth grades were contained in a single room, heated by a coal furnace space-heater. There were many good times with that furnace. Once when my father went to school at Centerville there was a boy full of spunk who stuffed the furnace with papers until it started to smoke. He kept this up until the intense smoke drove the teacher and the students out of the room. No school was held for the rest of that day so the room had a chance to air out.

The school is between 125 and 150 years old, and on its 100th anniversary many historical papers were written, to be kept in the files of Centerville School District.

(Continued on page two)



Photograph of Centerville School provided by Janet Prenot, also a student at Washington Junior High.

The present Centerville School has two rooms with first through sixth grades. The new one is in the same vicinity as the old one, but is located on Montague Road instead of facing Centerville Road.

The old Centerville Schoolhouse was made of light tan bricks and has old-fashioned wooden doors. The addition has been added since it ceased being a school. The owners are Mr. and Mrs. Compton.

The first teacher at Centerville Grade School was Mrs. Farnum, who taught there for a number of years.

(The following paragraphs regarding Centerville School were written by Janet Prenot.)

Centerville School is now over 125 years old. It was called Centerville School because of its location at the corner of Centerville and Montague Roads. It had only one room consisting of wooden benches, a pot belly stove, and a desk for the teacher.

At first there was enough room for the students because it was only a small community, but as the years went by the community grew larger and more families moved in, so the school became too small to accommodate the students.

In 1951 a new school was being built. The Board of Education auctioned off the old school, and it was purchased by Mr. and Mrs. Clifford C. Compton for \$600. The school was still used for classes for about two more months until the new school building was finished. When they took possession, Mr. and Mrs. Compton divided the one room into four parts, making a dining room, two bedrooms, and a living room. Then they added the kitchen, a bath, and a back room. The address is now Route 8, Box 894, Centerville Road, Rockford, Illinois.



at 1116 Montague Street. Montague School presently has four grades, including kindergarten. It has an enrollment of 325, and its principal at the present time is James McCauley.

The principal in 1936 was Mrs. Anna B. Dexter. Some of the older people call her "The Grand Old Lady of South Rockford." She is quoted as saying, "Teaching was my joy!" She loved the children of South Rockford. Her simple

grave stone says, "Anna B. Dexter, Principal of Montague School."

MONTAGUE SCHOOL---ITS PAST AND PRESENT GLORIES

By Jeffrey Harris

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

Have you seen this red brick schoolhouse bearing the name of Montague School and wondered how it got its name? It was named for Richard Montague, an early settler. He came from Massachusetts to Rockford in July of 1835 and settled on a tract of land southwest of what was then the city limits.

Montague School was built in 1883, so is presently 84 years old. Its location is 1306 South Court Street. When Montague was first built, it had a bell tower at the top of the building. In 1911 and 1928 additions were made, and at one of those times the tower was removed. Its grades first ran from kindergarten through eighth grade. The school became too crowded, so the students were sent to Barbour School which is located

NUMBER 524 KENT STREET

By Eugene Williams

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

The title is intended to remind the reader of the well-known Number 10 Downing Street. The grand old building on Kent Street to which Number 524 Kent Street refers has an old and honored history. It was not always a center of culture, social activities, and recreation. It was formerly the Kent Street School, an elementary school. After serving as a school, it



was turned into a place for recreation for Negro soldiers stationed at Camp Grant.

Later it was established as a community center, a Red Feather Agency, offering education, recreation, crafts, and leadership to all. Its present executive director is Mr. McKinley "Deacon" Davis. Mr. Davis has acquired considerable favorable publicity for his athletic achievements, but to most people he is now known for his efficient management of Booker T. Washington Social Center activities.

The future outlook for this ninety-nine-year-old building is that it will continue to build leaders, stress the need for higher and better education, and good government.

MIDDLE CREEK PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

By Edward Kistler

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

Middle Creek Presbyterian Church is located about 13 miles from Rockford in the southwest corner of Winnebago County. It is on Montague Road near Winnebago, Illinois. Built in June, 1855, the church building and its furniture cost about \$2,100 besides the money needed to haul supplies, the hiring of workmen, etc. This work was done mostly by the congregation. The church building was constructed of wood. Mr. John Kosier was the builder, and Mr. James Milligan built the foundation.

The dedication for the church building was made by a Rock River Presbytery on Friday, May 10, 1861. Rev. E. Erskine preached the sermon and the dedicatory

prayer was made by Rev. W. P. Carson.

In 1911, an extensive remodeling program and an addition of rooms in the basement were the only remodeling changes in the church since 1883, when twelve feet were added to the north end of the church. On August 16, 1902, a deed was drawn up of the church grounds. In 1937, the church had purchased some more land from the Osborn family for the church cemetery.

On June 20, 1866, Dr. Joseph Stevenson Braddock became the first minister of Middle Creek Church. He was born on June 27, 1817, in Green County, Pennsylvania. Dr. Braddock was an active minister for forty-two years. He died on April 29, 1900. Dr. Braddock and his family are buried in the church cemetery.

Reverend Harry Patterson Armstrong was the second minister of Middle Creek Church. He was born on June 17, 1870, in Allegheny County, Pennsylvania. Rev. Armstrong was ordained to the church on April 10, 1901. One of the fascinating things about Rev. Armstrong was that he died on Good Friday and was buried on Easter Sunday.

Reverend Howard Strong was ordained and married at



Middle Creek Church. He was there only five years. He left Middle Creek Presbyterian Church and went to Iowa to be a minister there. He has recently passed away.

Reverend George H. Swalve, Jr., is the fourth and present minister at Middle Creek Presbyterian Church. He was born on September 21, 1920. He was ordained on October 14, 1946.

The church had a new part added onto the west side of the building. This part of the church is the educational unit. It was built in 1961. The new section

is constructed of brick. The dedication was made by Rev. Swalve on October 1, 1961. The main church building is now almost 112 years old.

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A HOUSE IN WINNEBAGO

By Tom Buchmann

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

In 1874, Nahum Parsons began constructing a house in Winnebago, Illinois. It was designed in early Victorian, with essentially Italian architecture. Mr. Parsons and his wife Nancy moved into the place in 1876. The Parsons' son Hugh lived in the house until 1940, when the Jacobs family purchased it. They lived there until 1958, when they sold it to Milton Fisher. He lived there until 1965, when Mr. Jon E. Fritsch became the present owner of this lovely home. Mr. Fritsch is an English teacher at Rock Valley College in Rockford.

The exterior is of red brick with white trim. The windows are tall, arched, and narrow. A barn, located near the house, burned down a few years ago.

Many old fashioned flowers trim the walk and the driveway. The flower gardens contain such flowers as bleeding hearts, zinnias, asters, cosmos, and also creeping foliage along the edge.

The inside of the house is entirely furnished with antiques of the period such as brass beds, marble topped tables, sideboard, and dressers. There are also many English and German dishes, some dating from the 1850's. Also there are early American and Victorian antiques such as coffee pots, coffee grinders, and old phonographs, one playing cylinder records. The dining room is completely planed in walnut.

The fireplaces are of Italian marble and fancy Victorian style. The only remodeling done to the house was the bathroom and the space under the staircase.



There were no utilities in the house until 1926.

The wife of Hugh Parsons was on trial in Rockford in 1919 for being a Socialist. She was defended by the famous lawyer, Clarence Darrow. Later Mrs. Parsons wrote a book about the trial entitled THE TRIAL OF HELEN MACLOUD, in which the house is described.

The house is located on Cunningham Road, Winnebago, Illinois.

Source of information: Mr. Jon E. Fritsch, owner.

NOTE: If anyone has a copy of the book, THE TRIAL OF HELEN McCLOUD, please contact Mrs. Hazel M. Hyde, 1518 Comanche, telephone 398-0459; she would like to use it as a historic reference.



A CENTURY OF CHURCH HISTORY ON WINNEBAGO STREET

By Marlene White and David Lee

(Students at Washington Junior High School)

As you pull up to the four-way stop at the corner of Morgan and Winnebago Streets in Rockford, Illinois, you will notice that there is nothing but a vacant lot on the southeast corner. However, if you had looked there a few months ago, you would have seen the hand-



some red brick church building pictured here. This location has been the church home for many people down through the past one hundred and two years.

Back on August 8, 1864, ground was broken for the building of the first church to stand on these two lots, donated by T.D. Roginson to the Winnebago Street Methodist Church. The first church was of wood and

cost \$8,000 to build. It was dedicated on February 12, 1865. This building was later moved to the corner of Rock and Morgan Streets to make way for the new brick church.

On October 26, 1903, ground was broken for the brick church which was recently razed. It cost \$22,000 and was dedicated November 27, 1904. The church was built of red bricks with a stone foundation. The design was of the Acion Plan.

The interior of the church consisted of the sanctuary with its beautiful altar, stained windows, and its open beams. The pastor's office had a fireplace and a mantle. The Nina Schlager Room was dedicated in 1952 in honor of the lady who gave her service in playing the old pump organ for twenty-five years. A new electric organ was purchased after her death and again in 1962. The kitchen was somewhat remodeled in the 1960s. The fellowship hall was used for many purposes. It also had a nursery and several Sunday School rooms. The church had a bellfry tower from which a bell used to ring years ago and from which passersby could hear the Christmas music and hymns at Christmas time.

(To be continued in the next issue)



"Colonial Acres," about which an article appeared in the preceding issue of NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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