

## NUGGETS of HISTORY

Bi-Monthly Bulletin of the Rockford Historical Society  
July-August, 1967 Volume IV, Number 5

### GERMANICUS KENT

By Mary E. Apperson, Blacksburg, Virginia  
(Reprinted from A HISTORY OF THE  
BLACKSBURG PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH)

Germanicus Kent, son of John and Sarah Kent, was born in Suffield, Conn., May 31, 1791. He was descended from a long line of distinguished ancestors who contributed much to the development of the church and state in the early settlement of the country—Gov. Thomas Dudley, of Massachusetts, Gov. William Leete, of Connecticut, the Right Rev. John Woodbridge, I and II, the Rev. Benjamin Ruggles and was a nephew of the noted Chancellor James Kent.

After attending Yale College in 1822 he went to Huntsville, Alabama and was engaged in the cotton business, and while there he married Miss Arabella Amiss, of Culpeper, Va., on June 7th, 1827. In 1834, because of the insistence of his brother, Rev. Aratus Kent, of Galena, Illinois, he moved with his wife, child and a colored servant to Illinois and later became the founder of what is now known as the city of Rockford, afterward serving in the State Legislature. It was in his home that the first religious service was held by his brother Aratus, who was one of the first missionaries to that section and the founder of Beloit and Rockford Colleges. In 1843, due to the severity of the climate he brought his family to Blacksburg, Va., which was the home of Mrs. Kent's parents, Mr. and Mrs. Lewis Amiss.

He was the father of eight children—John, Mary, Cecelia, Arabella, Lewis, Charlotte and two who died in infancy. After the death of his wife, May 26, 1851, Mr. Kent made his home with his daughter, Mary, who had married Dr. Harvey Black, the descendant of the original settlers of Blacksburg, a prominent physician and patron of education.

In the Journal of Mr. Kent, kept from 1845 through 1860, one will find many interesting notations, among them his high regard for one's religious duty to his Maker, Church and State, and his earnest encouragement of his children to live the lives of Christians. He was interested in every phase of education and in 1855 he sent money to his sister of Suffield, Conn., for the purpose of securing a library for the Sunday School of the church of his early years. This fact is recorded in his journal.

A gentleman of integrity and of the highest character, Mr. Kent lived the rest of his life in Blacksburg with his daughter, Mrs. Black, where he died in 1862 and was buried in West View Cemetery. The Presbyterian Church of Blacksburg contains a handsome memorial window, bearing evidence of the feeling for the recognition of the life he lived and for the principles for which he stood. This window was given by the Black family.

\* \* \*



Rockford in 1853 looking west from Madison Street  
(Photograph courtesy of Cynthia Weatherall)

INFORMATION GIVEN BY MARY AND A. D. ERLANDER, 1946  
By Hazel M. Hyde

Preceding a personal interview, the following note was received by Miss Hazel Mortimer, then residing at 943 Kishwaukee Street.  
"Dear Miss Mortimer,

"Returning today your questionaire, we hope we have given some slight information which might interest you. As to your question of our ancestry, we are enclosing information you may use if you wish.

"We would be pleased to have you call for an interview any time after Easter Sunday.

Sincerely yours--  
A.D. and Mary O. Erlander"

Rockford, April 4 - 1946

The questions and answers were handwritten and there were comments giving additional information in some cases. It follows:

I. Why did the Swedish people migrate to Rockford? Some people give these reasons. Please mark the ones that seem true to you and comment on them.

1. Wages were high in the United States.

Comment: Money being very scarce, the usual wage for hired man was 100 kr. per year, and the remainder in wearing apparel and other necessities. Although the wages in America for the emigrant was more in cash, he was often not much ahead as the cash was often spent.

2. The estate usually passed to the oldest son in Sweden, so younger sons and daughters emigrated.

Comment: True in a general sense, later. Many of the earliest Swedish emigrants included the whole family, not excepting the oldest son.

3. Emigrant-travel companies, steamship companies, and American states put advertisements in papers or sent maps and booklets (About what date?)

Comment: True in the 1870's and 1880's but not the earliest emigrants.

4. Letters from friends and relatives (often with tickets enclosed) made people want to come to America.

Comment: True, but often the reports were greatly exaggerated causing embarrassment and hardship to the emigrant.

5. Because of religious persecution many people left Sweden.

Comment: Not true--The State Church demanded a certain fundamental knowledge of the Bible and Luther's Catechism for everyone and naturally opposed all so called "freak religions"--and were erroneously accused of persecution.

6. The hope of obtaining public land in Illinois drew the Swedish immigrants.

Comment: True in the 1860's.

7. Denial of political suffrage was a reason.

Comment: Universal suffrage was denied, as only those could vote who had some land. The more land, the more votes.

8. Social inequalities were irritating in Sweden.

Comment: True.

9. There was a feeling that there was no future in

Sweden.

Comment: The feeling was that there was not so great and immediate a future in Sweden.

10. Earlier Swedish immigrants returned to Sweden to tell about the opportunities in the United States.

Comment: Few returned.

11. Patriotism was low in Sweden at that time. (Why?)

Comment: Not true. The earliest emigrants were very loyal to Sweden but appreciated the better economic conditions in America and often recalled, and were proud of their heritage.

12. The Swedes came to America to get out of military training.

Comment: Partly true.

13. Crop failures in 1867 and 1869 caused many to come to America.

(No comment made.)

14. Can you think of other reasons?

(No comment made.)

15. Which of these reasons did NOT seem to apply to the Swedes who came to Rockford?

(No comment made.)

16. Why was Rockford chosen as a destination?

Comment: During the Asiatic cholera epidemic of 1853 and 1854 many emigrants came to Chicago. Rev. Erland Carlson advised them not to stay in Chicago but to get out into the country as far as the railroad would take them. As the Chicago and Galena Union R.R. bridge was not completed over the Rock River they settled on the east side.

17. Did most of the Swedes come by boat from Buffalo to Chicago? (About what was the cost?)

Comment: Some sailed up the St. Lawrence to Quebec and Montreal and continued to Chicago by water.

#### THE GRIP IN THE SCHOOLS (Continued from last issue)

It is a fact that not a single teacher in the Lincoln school has been sick enough to have to give up her work. The grip has been very severe on the schools of Rockford, attacking teachers and pupils regardless of age or sex. Fully a quarter of the students have been sick, but the back bone of the grip seems to be broken, as the children are coming back to school and the teachers are recovering rapidly.

Prof. Walker has escaped the grip, but he has had to exercise considerable generalship to keep all the schools running.

\* \* \* \* \*

#### MEMORIES OF EARLY ROCKFORD

By Bill Berkheimer

(Student at Jefferson Junior High School)

My grandfather, Everett W. Russ, who was born April 20, 1883, has lived most of his 84 years in and around Rockford. He has lived and worked on a farm northeast of Rockford for the past 25 years. The following information and descriptions are products of his scrapbooks and his fantastic memory for names, dates, and places.

One of the earliest memories of grandfather's is of driving on 7th Street with his father in a horse and wagon. They delivered milk from house to house, and dipped it from large cans and sold it for five cents a quart. At this time, in 1890 and 1895, there was no pavement and there were no curbs, and the mud was up to the horse's stomach.

There were horsedrawn streetcars in 1888 and on for some years. You could ride from one end of Rockford to the other for five cents. A turntable on South Main at Montague enabled the streetcars to turn around on the west side of the river. The turntable on the east side of Rockford was at East State and Shaw Streets.

In 1893 and 1894, my grandfather remembers the school children sliding from Montague School on sleds down the hill and across the river on the ice.

A vivid memory of Grandpa's is a whole block that was burned down on 7th Street in 1895 or 1896. He lived on 10th Avenue at that time, and not too far from the burned buildings.

The year before Theodore Roosevelt was elected President in 1904, he visited Rockford while making campaign speeches from the back of a train. Grandpa remembers seeing him at the Northwestern Railroad yards.

Around the turn of the century, and shortly thereafter, there was a park located north of Auburn Street and west of North Main Street. This was called the Rockford Driving Park. Fairs, picnics, and motorcycle races were held there.

My great grandfather owned a bottling company in 1908. This company bottled a soft drink, and was called the 'Iron Brew Bottling Company'. Their truck (or bus) is a part of Rockford's history, as this truck was the very first gasoline-operated truck in Rockford. This very unusual truck (pictured on the next page) carried not only the product of this company, but on evenings and weekends it carried athletic teams, church groups, and picnicking families in and around Rockford for many years. It was a 1906 Rapid.

During the year 1907 and for quite a few years there was a passenger steamboat that operated on the Rock River. People boarded this boat behind the Rockford Public Library. It was strictly a pleasure boat. They



steamed up the river to about where Roscoe is, then back down the river where it turned around at the State Street bridge. Grandmother played in the Rockford Ladies Band in the years 1916 and 1917, and played on the steamboat on numerous occasions.

The Quaker Oats Plant here in Rockford used to be called the Oak Packing Company. In 1914, this concern butchered as many as 1455 hogs in one day. At that time, this was considered a very large amount.

In the year 1920, Grandpa Russ operated a large cement mixer that was used in the construction of Charles Street Road, from the Boone County line west into Rockford. The foregoing incidents are just a few of the many memories and stories that my jack-of-all-trades Grandpa has. He could tell more for hours and hours.

#### WINNEBAGO COUNTY'S FIRST SCHOOL TEACHER

The first school in Winnebago County was taught by Miss Eunice Brown, who came here in 1837 and began teaching in a log house which was located in the vicinity of what would now be 110 South Second Street. Although a school was also begun by Miss Frances Bradford on the west side that same year, Miss Brown's school was the earlier of the two, giving her the honor of being first.

Miss Brown later taught on the west side in several places, one being in a building located on what later became the court house square. She remained unmarried until she was past sixty years of age, at which time

she married an elderly Shirland farmer named J.G. Lyon. She lived to be eighty-six years old, passing away on December 7, 1889.

#### BAD GIRLS FROM BELOIT (Reprinted from THE ROCKFORD DAILY REGISTER, February 6, 1890)

Saturday evening four young girls, ranging from 10 to 12 years of age, in company with two young men, the elder being probably 21 years old, came by team from Beloit and made the natives of Rockford blush with their drunked carousels. They were finally picked up by Marshal Martin and taken before Magistrate Joslyn and assessed a fine and costs of \$19.50. The young lads having no money put up a gold watch as security, and they were allowed to depart. One of the little girls, when asked where she resided, said she lived on Tough Street, and the further you went down the street the tougher it became, and she lived in the last house on that street.

#### PILGRIM BAPTIST CHURCH

By Marketa Haynes

(Student at Washington Junior High School)

Pilgrim Baptist Church, the first Negro Baptist church in Rockford, was organized in the year 1917. Messrs. Grant Madison, Louis Branch, Walter Brooks, and a gentleman named Banks, organized a Sunday School and a prayer meeting. Rev. J. C. China was elected superintendent of the Sunday School.

On August 6, 1917, due largely to the efforts of the Reverend Adam Madison, a church was organized. This was at 812 West Street, at the home of Grant Madison. The new church was named Pilgrim Rest Baptist Church a name suggested by Louis Branch. There were twenty-two members present at the organizational meeting.

In October, 1917, the church called its first pastor, Rev. Mr. T. P. McGee. He served Pilgrim for seven months and twenty-seven days. Under his leadership, property was acquired for a church on Montague Street.

In July, 1919, the congregation moved from the building at 846 Montague Street to the next church at Morgan and West Streets. This was the first real church building that Pilgrim members had used for their worship.

In 1920, the Rev. G.W. Dudley resigned. After a short time without a pastor, Rev. Fitts was called. Rev. J.W. Fitts was followed in 1922 by Rev. W. R. Jackson. In February, 1935, Rev. W. H. Woods became pastor.

In October, 1944, Rev. Eldridge H.E. Gilbert, the

youngest of the pastors, was called. He accepted the Pilgrim pastorate while attending the Virginia Union University, having graduated from the American Baptist Theological Seminary earlier that year. He continued his studies and received his B. A. degree in 1947 from Beloit College. This dedicated man is still pastor.

In the year 1960, Pilgrim Baptist Church built a new church at 1703 South Central Avenue. The architect for the new church was Mr. Charles E. Boettcher. The contractors were Mr. O. and Ralph Bakken, hired for \$155,500.

The outside of the church is white. You go upstairs into a room in which you walk on red carpeting. There are three aisles and the pews.

The new church has a narthex of 15 x 32 feet, which opens into a nave of 68 x 44. The Chancel, 19 x 34, is split. The choir section is divided for 50 people including room for a piano and an organ. The Baptistry is behind the chancel wall, three feet above the nave level. It is elevated, open and lighted that all may see from any place in the church. The Baptistry front is of white marble. A specially designed baldachin with a 20-foot gold curtain gives color to the chancel. The plan is to add a communion table of the same marble. The Pulpit and the Lectern each have a special cross on cross, designed by the church architect. The balcony is 16 x 32. The church will hold 550 adults. The nave level is on the second floor to permit many activities to be held on the first floor.

The ground breaking ceremonies were held in April, 1960. The Honorable Ben T. Schleicher, mayor of Rockford, was present.

Then came the ceremony of laying the corner stone. The items in the corner stone were a vial of oil, a vial of corn, a measure of gold, a Bible carried in the Civil War, a New Testament, the ashes from the first mortgage, a copy of "The Messenger", the church paper, written in 1924, a copy of the Crusader (a weekly newspaper), a copy of the 1960 membership list of Pilgrim Church, a picture of members prior to a communion service in September, 1960, and a copy of the corner stone laying ceremony. A member of Pilgrim, Brother Douglas Pilgrim, who was a stone cutter, worked the corner stone.

---

The annual meeting and picnic of the Rockford Historical Society will be at Alpine Park on September 10.

---

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published bi-monthly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois. President: Brice H. Sheets. Editor: Robert H. Borden. Associate Editor: Hazel M. Hyde. Address correspondence to Editor, 1325 Cospers Avenue, Rockford, Illinois 61107.