

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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AFTER A HUNDRED TWENTY-FIVE YEARS

(Continued from last issue)

By Randy Kramer

(Auburn High School Student)

The farm was then divided into subdivisions on the other side of the highway. Mr. Bokker has found many Indian arrow heads on the land. The present owners are Mr. and Mrs. Vincent Kramer.

After more than 125 years the farm house still looks like new, due to the care it has received. The barn has been freshly painted white with a light blue foundation. In the hayloft the floor is made of maple hard wood. There is a basketball court as well. Many school basketball games have been played on the premises.



The house is covered with wooden siding and is also painted white. The porch is a clear gray and is screened in. The lolly-pop-shaped driveway is about one-fourth of a mile long.

Magnificent timber land is on the grounds. Once it might have been the hunting grounds of the great Blackhawk as he wandered along Rock River.

SORRY! Readers may have noticed that the last issue of NUGGETS OF HISTORY was labeled Volume IV, Number 5. It should have been Volume IV, Number 6. This was entirely the fault of the editor, and he will strive to prevent it from happening again.

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS

By William Hulin

(Reprinted from 1857 Rockford City Directory)

Rockford, the county seat of Winnebago Co., Illinois, is named from the ford of rock at the head of the rapids which spread over a lime rock bed about eight hundred feet in width; and the City is beautifully situated upon both sides of the Rock River. The first permanent settlement in this County was made here, on the west side of the rapids, by Germanicus Kent, in the fall of 1834, and in the course of the year 1835 the settlement of that part of the city which lies upon the east side of the river was commenced by Daniel S. Haight. The land on which the most important part of the city now stands, on both sides of the river, remained the property of the United States until the fall of 1843, when it was purchased at a dollar and a quarter per acre.

At the rapids an immense power exists, which has been improved and rendered permanent by the construction of a substantial dam by a Water Power Company, chartered by the legislature for that purpose. By this means, the whole of Rock River, with a head of eight feet --- and capable of being increased to ten --- is made available for propelling machinery. The races are cut in rock, and all the improvements are of the most durable character. Grist-mills, saw-mills, furnaces, foundries, planing-machines, etc., and manufacturing establishments for various kinds of machinery and agricultural implements are now in successful operation. The manufacture of pearl starch from corn, is carried on extensively and with eminent success on this water-power --- with success, whether we consider the pure and excellent quality of the article produced, or the remuneration realized. Manny's celebrated reapers are here manufactured in large numbers, by a company consisting of Jesse Blinn, Ralph Emerson, and Wait Talcott, who employ about two hundred men, and transact a business of about half a million dollars per annum. This enumeration includes but a part of the works in actual operation. There are others deserving of an extended notice, and the number is steadily increasing, yet the capacity of the water power is far beyond its present use, and valuable privileges are still to be had on terms that promise rich returns to further investments.

At the east end of the city bridge, on State street, East Rockford, are extensive foundries and machine shops, embracing several departments, such as a furnace for casting machinery and agricultural implements of every description, a forge where the works in

wrought iron are performed, a finishing shop for articles of iron manufacture, cast and wrought, where steam engines and other machinery are completed with an elegance which would do credit to other cities; also, extensive shops for the manufacture of doors, sash, blinds --- and woodwork for ploughs, cultivators, &c.

The lumber market is superior to any other in this part of the State except Chicago --- the sale of pine lumber alone being equal to about a million and a half each month, saying nothing of heavy supplies of other lumber, and of timber received from the surrounding country, and that rafted down the Pecatonica and Rock Rivers, and yet the supply does not meet the demand, and evidently would not, if it were nearly or quite double.

The progress of building, great and rapid as it is here, would be much accelerated by more plentiful supplies of lumber. Other materials for building can be had in the immediate vicinity of the city, there being extensive quarries of excellent cream-colored limestone, brick-yards, &c.

The buildings for the last few years, in durability of material and style of architecture, have exhibited gratifying evidence of the taste and wealth of the inhabitants. The city bridge, and the bridge of the Chicago and Galena Union Railroad Company across Rock River --- the latter built at a cost exceeding fifty thousand dollars --- are magnificent structures, and among the best public works in this part of the State. The railroad bridge is built on the solid rock of the ford, and is sustained by six massive stone piers, resting upon the limestone bed of the river.

The city was incorporated in 1852, and now contains over eight thousand inhabitants. There are eleven places of public worship, including two Congregational, two Methodist, one Baptist, one Episcopal, one Unitarian, one Presbyterian, one Catholic, one Disciples, or Campbellites, and one Swedish Lutheran.

The hotel accommodations are admitted by all travelers and visitors to be equal to the best, and as a "first class house" for size, finish, elegance of architecture and completeness of appointments, the "Holland House" will not suffer by comparison with any other.

The inhabitants are mostly from the Eastern States, and in scarcely any other locality does a visitor behold so readily the unmistakable characteristics of an eastern town, not the least notable of which are its literary and scientific institutions. Among these stands prominently the Rockford Female Seminary, chartered in 1847, which during the time of its existence has educated hundreds of students, the number of whom

has steadily kept pace with the progress of the edifices for their accommodation. There are numerous academical schools for the education of young men, in which they are prepared for college, and for the mercantile and other important pursuits of life. Two magnificent Union School Houses, of stone, built under the direction of the City Council, at a cost of fifteen thousand dollars each, for free schools, are nearly completed, and will soon be dedicated to the great purpose of their erection.

A large tract of land has been purchased on the western margin of the city, as the site of a first class Methodist Seminary, which will speedily be erected thereon, and thus make an important addition to their institutions of learning and the social advantages of the place.

The city of Rockford has important railroad connections, first by the Galena and Chicago Union and Illinois Central Roads, which have already completed the route from the great lakes to the Mississippi, Rockford being the central point upon the same; next, by the Rockford and Warsaw Road, which is already in progress; then the Rockford and Rock Island Road, which has been chartered to run through the rich valley of Rock River, and must soon be built. The requisite amount of stock for the building of a railroad from Kenosha (Wisconsin), on Lake Michigan, to Rockford, is nearly all taken, and there can be no doubt of the successful accomplishment of this great and important enterprise.

It is contemplated to push the line right along down the river, and the people of the river towns express themselves ready to aid to the utmost. It will then form another grand chain from Lake Michigan to the Mississippi. It is also nearly certain that Rockford will speedily be put in direct connection with Racine, by an extension of the Racine railroad from Rockton to Rockford, which, by a still further southern extension sure to follow, will, in fact, be connecting the Illinois Central with the principal railroads in Wisconsin, opening at once to Rockford the rich coal fields of the south and the lumber regions of the north, and to all intents making Rockford a point on the great Illinois Central railroad.

Elegant, costly and substantial works for supplying the city with gas have been erected during the present year. The pipes are already laid through the principal streets, and under the energetic management of Mr. Herrick, who has the charge and direction of the work, it is confidently expected that the "Forest City" will be visible by gas light by Christmas or New Years.

Metropolitan Hall is an elegant public edifice, erected this year in East Rockford by Messrs. Spafford

and John H. Hall. There are two public halls in West Rockford, in the buildings of U. M. Warner and Ticknor and Dickerman.

The second Congregational Society will build for their accommodation a church edifice in West Rockford, of the cream colored lime stone taken from the quarries around the city. The building is to cost \$25,000 and to be modelled after the Romanesque style of architecture, with one hundred and eighty pews, and a capacity for eight hundred people.

Rockford, although young, "has a history," and that history, with the accumulations of future years, will in due season be written and transmitted to the successors of its past and present inhabitants. But "the time is not yet," and the work must be deferred until its chronicles have attained a wider magnitude.

The position of Rockford is a most favorable one, and the surrounding country, for health, beauty and fertility, is unsurpassed. The banks of Rock River are green and smooth, with a gradual slope to the water's edge, and are consequently always clean and pleasant. There is no swamp, morass, or "low wet ground" to mar the beauty of the view, or to make even one single lot disagreeable or unhealthy. Those who have been accustomed to seeing such repelling features on other rivers, and expect to behold them on Rock River, are destined to enjoy an agreeable surprise whenever they visit this section. Let anyone who has stood upon the banks of the Connecticut at a season when the flowers, the grass, the trees, and the fields of wavering grain, array Nature in her most delightful garb, imagine a region vastly more fertile, a river more silvery, and a scenery handsomer in its natural state than that which on the Connecticut has been rendered so brilliant by a century of cultivation, and he will readily understand what is the character of the Rock River Valley.

Nearly every acre of the land along the river is available for building purposes or tillage, and affords dry and pleasant lots for homesteads. The annoyances of mosquitoes and other unpleasant visitors, which, on the banks of many streams "murder sleep" and render night horrible, are here almost unknown.

(Editor's note: The author of this article, William Hulin, was clerk of the county court at the time he wrote the article. He was a native of Salem, Massachusetts, which probably explains his high regard for the "unmistakeable characteristics of an eastern town" which Rockford supposedly possessed. Hulin settled in Rockton Township about 1837 and moved to Rockford in the early 1840s. His account of Rockford in the 1857 city directory is undoubtedly one of the earliest to be written. He died December 10, 1869.)



A HOUSE DOWN THE ROAD
By Jeff Makulec
(Washington Junior High School Student)

Is there an old house near you? Probably, but you might not know it. Old houses sometimes look only thirty or forty years old and they are in actuality twice that age. The house down the road, which is eighty-two years old and has several styles of windows, is located on Centerville Road. It is the first inhabited building on the left as you turn north from Montague Road onto Centerville Road.

Aron Hovey, who was the first owner of the original one hundred sixty acres, built the house in 1885. In 1889, the Hamer family moved into the place. And in 1898, the main part was added onto this large, white, wood-paneled building. The T. S. Hamer family or a member of it continued to live there until 1961. At that time Mr. Thomas Scott Hamer moved away to live with George Hamer, one of his three sons.

George Hamer was once in the hardware business, but is now a successful insurance man. He gives talks on the Bible animals, and has written two books entitled "Big Game in Africa" and "Hamer's Bible Animals".

Ralph Scott Hamer, another of the three sons, was once an industrious farmer but is now a successful businessman in the Woodward Governor Company. Patton Hamer was also employed at the Woodward Governor Company but has now passed away.

Mr. T. S. Hamer is at present 94 years old and had lived in the house most of his life. When this man was

a resident of the house in the late 1880's and early 1900's, his family had a set of fine china, cut glass articles, and other knick-knacks like most families of those days. If you had gone down into the basement, you would have found an old stone oven that weighed a couple of tons. I gather that it has been dismantled and is not there anymore.

On the premises are several buildings of assorted sizes. Of course, there is the house, but there is also a relatively small barn, a good-sized chicken shed, and a garage. The garage has a sliding door in front. All of the buildings on the land except the garage and the house are practically falling apart. Over the years they have been neglected and allowed to deteriorate. The house down the road has witnessed a lot of family life and happy days for the Hamer family.

HISTORY OF DURAND, ILLINOIS
(Reprinted from Durand Centennial Booklet, 1956)

Early in the year 1835 there were no permanent residences in this locality of Northern Illinois that now consist of townships Durand and Laona; however, men had heard of the rich, rolling land in the beautiful valleys of the Sugar, Rock and Pecatonica rivers from "trail tales" of those people who had traveled the Chicago-Galena and Mineral Point trail. Two of those men were Nelson Salisbury and Harvey Lowe, of La Porte, Indiana, who, in the fall of 1835 came to this vicinity and staked claims in Sec. 32, 34, and 31 respectively.

They were joined by Newman Campbell and D.E. Sterns (who came about a week later). Sterns and Campbell cut timber for the early settlers. The men returned to Indiana for their families and possessions and with Scott Robb and his family on May 17, 1836, were the first to use the ferry boat launched by Alva Trask at the present site of Trask bridge on Rt. 70. The party arrived at the ferry about a week earlier and helped Mr. Trask complete the boat.

The Lowe, Salisbury and Scott Robb families have the distinction of being the first permanent families in Durand township, but were followed the next day by Newman Campbell, who also returned with his family. Others who followed were John Pfeffer, Heman Campbell, Homer Denton, John Robb, Edward Smith, Joseph Riche, Heman Hoyt, Morlin and Davis Borst and Phillip Culver. All of these people settled in the extreme southwest portion of Durand township, part of which is now Pecatonica and Rock Run townships. The county of Winnebago was divided in 1839, Ogle, Boone and Stephenson counties being formed from it. Winnebago is one of the

few in Illinois named after the Indians -- the majority of counties are named after national heroes and statesmen of earlier days.

The first year the settlers raised corn, oats, buckwheat, potatoes and a few garden vegetables.

In 1837 brought the following: George and John Pettingill, Elizah and George Felts, George Cochran, John and B. Phillip, John A. Johnson, Stephen Reese, A. Cram, John H. Fleming, Charles M. Franklin, John and P. Mann and Dennis Brach, these too settled about four miles southwest of the present village and the settlement of Elton was formed, near the present Earl Haughton and R. Winchester farms.

The village once had 17 houses, a postoffice (Tyler), a store, and blacksmith, cooper shop, and stage stop for travelers continuing west to Galena or taking the northwest fork in the trail to Mineral Point.

The Derwents and Haughtons came from England about 1842 and settled at Elton. The Derwents were carpenters as well as farmers, and as the community needed flour, lumber and wagons they erected a flour and saw mill on Beaver Creek. Aaron Haughton was a stone mason and built the first stone house in the community. He was skilled at erecting stone arches and when the first attempt to build the Court House at Rockford in 1877 ended in disaster, he was called upon to complete the building which still stands.



Parade at Durand July 4, 1912

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