

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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TOMB NEAR A COUNTRY CHURCHYARD

By Edward Kistler

Near Middle Creek Church, rural Winnebago, a granite crypt has been cut into the hillside. About fifty yards from Montague Road is a path leading to a brass door. It is difficult to read the name engraved on the door because paint and scratches, made by vandals, almost obliterate the letters.

The tomb is the last resting place of Joseph Medill McCormick, an Illinois journalist, legislator, country squire, and U. S. Senator. His country estate, Rock River Farms, once occupied 2,400 acres along the west bank of Rock River near Byron and extending westward. He had a deer preserve and the finest dairy herd in this part of the country.

McCormick's tomb lies in the center of four acres of pines and dense underbrush. Through the trees you can see the towering top of nearby Middle Creek Presbyterian Church.

Joseph McCormick was a son of Robert Sanderson



McCormick, a United States diplomat. He was born in Chicago on May 16, 1877. McCormick worked as a reporter for the Chicago Tribune, which was published by his grandfather, Joseph Medill. He later became a leader of the old Progressive party. He served two terms in the Illinois legislature before being elected to Congress in 1916.

Joseph McCormick was credited by the NATIONAL CYCLOPEDIA for his achievements in the field of child labor legislation. He introduced the bill creating the federal Bureau of the Budget. His studies into the possibilities of a deep water project proved to be the forerunner of the St. Lawrence Seaway. He was elected to the United States Senate in 1918.

McCormick was a bitter opponent of the League of Nations. His campaign for re-election to the Senate in 1924 was to be based upon his successful fight to keep the United States out of the League of Nations. However, he was defeated for renomination in 1924 and retired to his estate. He died on February 25, 1925.

A fence has been built which extends from the front gate around the churchyard to the east side of the church, and the other half of the fence extends around behind Reverend Swalves' house. The front gate is opened in the daytime for people to visit the tomb.

GEORGE HASKELL OWNED THE LAND

By Linda Hill

In 1834 George Haskell bought 145.73 acres of land for \$182.16. The land extended from North Winnebago Street to Rock River. It was divided into twelve lots.

On September 9, 1875, the fifth lot was sold by Dennis P. Gray for \$2,000. In 1877 a large double-frame house was built on the land. Between 1878 and 1957 the property was sold and resold twenty-seven times.

In 1957 Maria Buscemi became the legal owner of the property. When she died, she left the house and land to her two sons, Frank and Tony Buscemi. Frank bought out Tony's share and converted the house to an apartment building. The house, situated at 401 North Winnebago Street, has seven two-room apartments.

At the west entrance, above the double glass doors, there is a white flowered stained glass window. On the north side there is a red and blue stained glass window.

The house used to be heated with coal but now uses oil. The limestone and brick foundation has been recently patched. There are three marble fireplaces



throughout the building.

The house is white trimmed in gray. All of the doors are painted black. The west porch is supported by tall wooden pillars. Bridal wreath bushes surround the house.

IT'S NICE TO BE WANTED

By Bridget Riggins

The Protestant Big Sisters of Rockford had an idea about twenty-two years ago. They needed a home for girls, but they had no money. "We are always returning the girls to their own homes after a visit with any of us. It defeats our purpose," said one Big Sister.

If they only had money to work with! They could not raise money in the Big Sisters because they were affiliated with Community Chest. The Big Sisters Committee finally decided to ask the Council of Church Women to help them with the fund-raising project. The committee formed a campaign and aimed at twenty-five thousand dollars for their goal.

They decided to have a kick-off breakfast at the Faust Hotel in Rockford. When the big day came, three-hundred-fifty women went to the breakfast. They were not there to be entertained but to be organized into a group which would raise the twenty-five thousand dollars.

Present at their first board meeting were seven Big Sisters, seven community people, and seven church women. The board asked the treasurer to give them their first report. The committee had collected \$23,063.04 in cash and \$1,167.24 in pledges, for a grand total of

\$24,220.28. They had achieved their goal.

Rockford used to be called the Forest City. Frank Edmison, the author of "Frankly Speaking", a column in the REGISTER-REPUBLIC, suggested the name of "Forest Hall". The board agreed, and Edmison's suggestion was adopted.

The board now had the money and the name, but they as yet had no suitable building. The search began because they knew what it would mean to the girls to be wanted. On October 2, 1946, the former parsonage of



Emmanuel Lutheran Church, 405 South Fourth Street, was purchased for \$15,000. On December 5 Forest Hall was officially opened with Mrs. Florence Mainland as house mother and four girls as the first family.

Forest Hall was dedicated on Sunday, November 16, 1947. Five hundred fifty guests were present who left generous donations amounting to seven hundred dollars. This sum delighted the board and promised much to make the girls comfortable.

The board then decided to have diminishing teas. They were planned so that one person had a tea and invited a certain number of people. Those invited would then hold teas of their own, inviting one less guest, until there was only one left. Over 12,000 women attended the teas, and each gave a small contribution. All of the talks, speeches, and teas centered around the welfare of the girls who would be served.

Forest Hall has thirteen rooms and a rec room in the basement. The girls have a regular school life, and go to the church of their choice every Sunday. Forest Hall continues to be sponsored by the Big Sisters, aided by the Community Chest and the Rockford Council of Churches.



WHERE BLACKHAWK ROAMED
By Ray Campbell

Blackhawk Park in Rockford is named after one of the most famous Indians in American history. Many monuments have been erected in honor of Blackhawk. One of these is the Blackhawk Statue by Lorado Taft, which towers over the Rock River about twenty miles south of Rockford. Blackhawk, chief of the Sauk tribe, and his braves lived near the mouth of Rock River.

In 1828 President John Quincy Adams opened Northern Illinois to settlement. The Indians would have to leave to make room for all the settlers. The Indians who had lived there moved out grudgingly. Blackhawk waited until 1829 when he was forced out by a seven hundred-man militia of settlers. In the year 1832 Blackhawk and some two thousand Sauk Indians were determined to go back to their homeland.

Blackhawk sent ahead six men under a flag of truce to talk to Major Stillman and some of his troops. The six men were killed. When word of this reached Blackhawk, he rode out with his Sauks to Major Stillman's camp. When they arrived there, the Indians killed eleven soldiers. The spot where this battle took place is now known as Stillman Valley, located about eighteen miles from Rockford on Highway 72. This was the first battle of the skirmish known as the Blackhawk War.

Seventy-nine days later the war was over. Blackhawk was captured. Much of his speech at this occasion has been quoted by Charles A. Church in his history of the county: "You have taken me prisoner with all my warriors...I fought hard. But your guns were well aimed. The bullets flew like birds in the air, and whizzed by our ears like the wind through the trees in the winter. My warriors fell around me; it began to look dismal. I saw my evil day at hand. The sun rose dim on us in

the morning, and at night it sunk in a dark cloud, and looked like a ball of fire. That was the last sun that shone on Black Hawk. His heart is dead and no longer beats quick in his bosom. He is now a prisoner to the white men; they will do with him as they wish. But he can stand torture, and is not afraid of death. He is no coward. Black Hawk is an Indian...Farewell, my nation! Black Hawk tried to save you, and avenge your wrongs. He drank the blood of some of the whites. He has been taken prisoner, and his plans are stopped. He can do no more. He is near his end. His sun is setting, and he will rise no more. Farewell to Black Hawk!"

On October 3, 1838, at the age of seventy-one, Blackhawk died. He was buried in a seated position, with his right hand resting on a cane presented to him by Henry Clay. Many of his war trophies were buried with him.

Rockford's Blackhawk Park, on the Rock River at Fifteenth Avenue, is ninety-one acres of woodland equipped with picnic facilities, a lighted baseball diamond, and a rest lodge of native stone. Families may be seen playing croquet or other games. A scenic drive winds its way through the park, and fishermen are often seen on the river bank.

Rockford's Park System was founded in 1909 by Robert Rew, Robert Tinker, and Levin Faust, and laid out by Paul R. Riis, a national authority on park development. The name Blackhawk was chosen for the fine recreation area along Rock River because the great chief had roamed along this river, and this land was part of the hunting grounds of the Sauk tribe.

A MAGNET FOR INDUSTRY By Jeff Makulec

The year 1843 can be remembered as an important one for Rockford industry. On February 28, the Illinois State Legislature approved the incorporation of the Rockford Hydraulic and Manufacturing Company. In the spring of 1844 a dam was begun across Rock River, almost directly opposite the municipal parking lot near Beattie Park. Edward S. Hanchett of Freeport began construction of the dam, but was later succeeded by C.C. Coburn. Construction was completed in the autumn of 1845.

On both the east and west sides of Rock River a channel was laid out to carry the water to the several mills built on the banks of the river. The east side race extended to Walnut Street and was twenty-three



feet wide. Six plants were located on it, three of them being sawmills. After the race was completed, Gregory, Phelps and Daniels built a sawmill near the dam. A Mr. Nettleton put a grist-mill near the end of the State Street bridge. This mill was one of the first of its kind in the county. Farther downstream J. B. Howell's woolen mill stood, and beyond that was the sawmill of Wheeler and Lyon.

On the west side of the river, a channel was laid out down as far as Mulberry Street. Robertson and Holland put a sawmill into operation at this point. A short distance upstream, Ethan Clark built and operated an iron foundry and machine shop.

The west end of the dam was washed out on April 26, 1846, but was immediately repaired by the company. In the spring of 1847 the dam's east end went out, and the sawmill of Gregory, Phelps and Daniels was carried away by the force of the water charging past. It was again repaired and this time continued in operation for four years. On June 1, 1851, the entire dam broke loose and was carried away.

On July 15, 1851, twenty-seven citizens of Rockford organized the "Rockford Water Power Company". In September of the same year, the Rockford Hydraulic and Manufacturing Company and the new Water Power Company became one.

The new firm, which kept the name Rockford Water Power Company, constructed a 750-foot dam across the river. The point at which it was built was across the "Rocky Ford" where "Fordam" Dam is now, and for which Rockford was named. This arc-shaped dam was finished in the spring of 1853. It was built so it curved upstream in the middle to increase the force of the water coming into the mill races.

The last company to use the races stopped during the 1950s in favor of more modern facilities. Then in 1963, the Rockford Water Power Company was dissolved.

Progress slowly eroded water power away as an important industry and source of energy. But in its place came the industries and opportunities that drew people to Rockford and turned it into an important industrial city.

WHERE WAS THIS HOUSE?



The above picture was taken in the spring of 1966 by your editor, but he can no longer remember where it was. Any information regarding the home shown here in the process of being razed will be appreciated. Call 968-6700.

ANOTHER LAND-MARK GONE



Former Hinchliff guest house at North Main and Indian Terrace razed to make room for housing for the elderly

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