

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

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THIS WAS KISHWAUKEE  
By William J. Condon

The early history of Kishwaukee Community has been given only brief notice in various publications of the past. These accounts were primarily in the works of Mr. Charles A. Church. Aside from this, no thorough or detailed account has ever been written. I will try to draw together here information concerning only the early years of the community. The information will be drawn from both written accounts and personal recollections of descendants of early pioneers.

The Condon family settled in Kishwaukee in 1857 after spending five years in Connecticut. Previous to that, the family resided in County Cork, Ireland. The Condons, however, were not among the early pioneers of the community since people began settling the area as early as 1836. For those not familiar with the location of Kishwaukee, one simply travels south on South Main Road for about three miles and turns left on the Belt Line Road and then right at the first road going southwest, which is Kishwaukee Road. The general boundaries of the community can be traced on the map shown on pages four and five. Generally the area included is determined by the school district of the area.

The community actually encompasses two counties, Winnebago and Ogle. The first known resident of the area was David Shumway. He and his family came here in May, 1836, from Oberlin, Ohio, where he had been employed as a carpenter. His home was the third residence on the right hand side of Kishwaukee road after turning off Belt Line Road. When he came to the community, there were only two buildings, a log cabin and a shanty. He played an important part in the early settlement of Winnebago County. An interesting side-light regarding Mr. Shumway is that his wife's name was Sallie Greeley, a relative of the famous Horace Greeley, founder of the New York TRIBUNE.

Mr. Shumway built a saw mill on the Kilbuck in 1837, but it was destroyed by fire. He then built a



Last Kishwaukee Settlement on Stillman Valley  
Road South of Kishwaukee School



First Rothwell Farm on Stillman Valley Road  
Part of Underground Railroad

saw mill at South Bend on the Kishwaukee Creek and used this mill to saw the lumber for the hotel that was built on his property in 1839.

One of Shumway's sons became quite famous by establishing the Shumway Seed Company. This man, R. H. Shumway, was recorded in 1905 as having paid the highest personal property tax of any Rockford resident, indicating a prosperous career.

From what I have been able to gather, the first settlement was located directly across the road from the Shumway farm. This development consisted of thirty-five to forty framed dwellings, only a few of which were enclosed. This settlement was never really established, and due to the skeleton-like structures the area was called Rib-Town. This first attempt at establishing a community occurred during 1837-1838. Many of the frame structures were torn down and removed, some to farms and some to Rockford. Two of these dwellings that were moved to Rockford were owned by Jonathan Hitchcock and a Mr. Ricard on North Second Street.

The second attempt to establish the area did not occur until after the first had failed. Many people do not realize that there were actually two Kishwaukees before a thriving community was finally established. This second development was laid out across the Kishwaukee River from the first, about a mile southwest of the first settlement, in 1839-1840. This was sometimes called Lee Town after its founder, George Lee. It was located on the upper bluff of the Kishwaukee River at its junction with the Rock. This area is now the site of a cabin used as a retreat by Rockford College. This town was established to take advantage of the steamboat trade, and a few boats did come up the river, but it soon gave way to Rockford's industrial development. The village actually was the size of Rockford at this time and had two stores and a blacksmith. Fever was instrumental also in limiting the growth of the community.

Directly across the road from this area was the proposed site of the first seminary in Winnebago Coun-



Maple Grove School  
Now a Farm Building



Frame Kishwaukee School  
On Farm on Rothwell Road

ty. It was only partially finished and was left standing until all windows were broken out. The idea for the seminary at the mouth of the Kishwaukee was conceived by Dr. A. M. Catlin and others who originated from the same area as David Shumway.

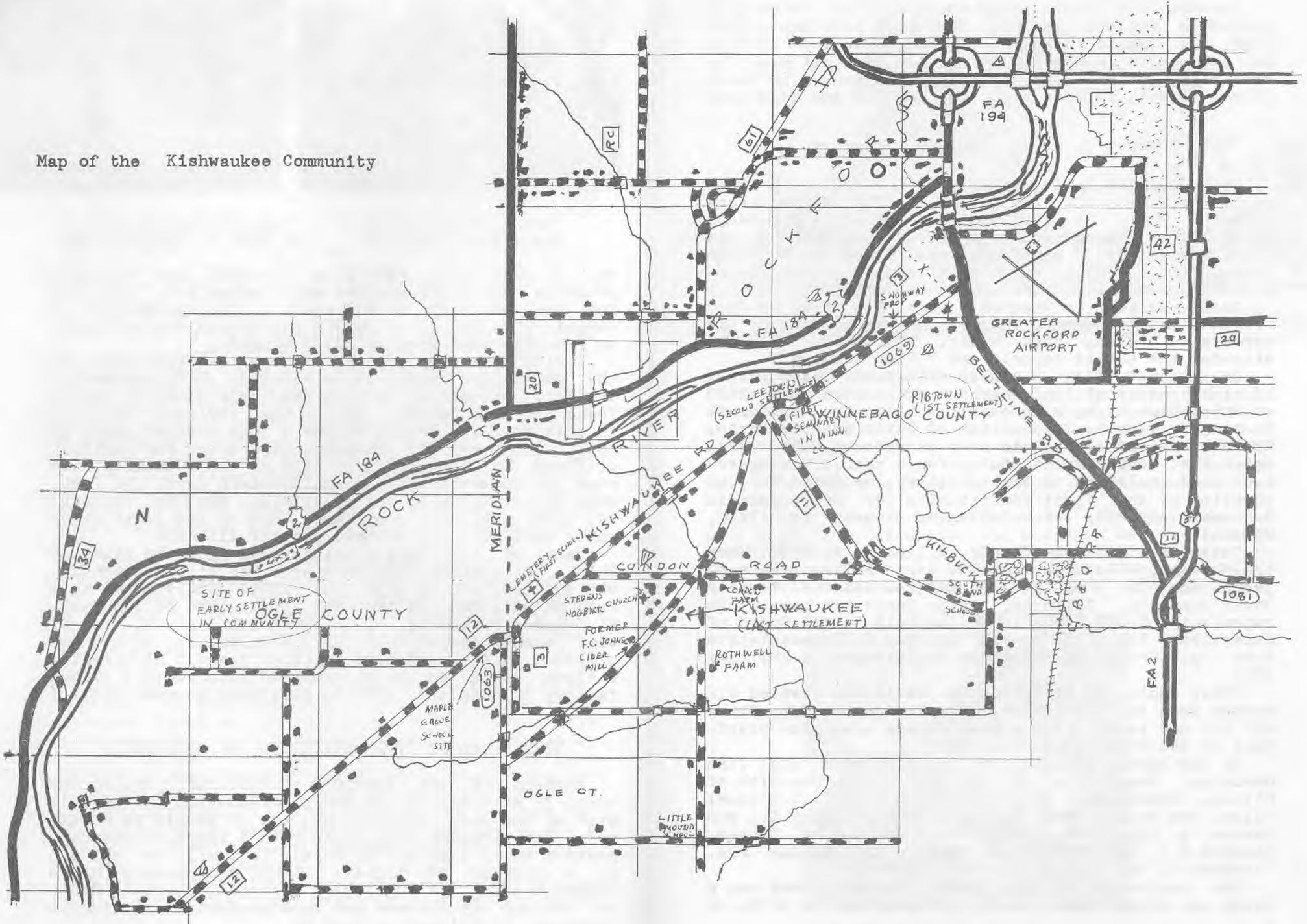
During this same period, the southwestern part of the community began to be settled. This appears on the left extreme of the map near Rock River in Marion Township, Ogle County. One of the earliest settlers in this area was Robert Rothwell who settled there in 1837. Just as the Shumways were among the earliest settlers in the northern part of the community, so were the Rothwells in the southwestern part. In fact, when Robert Rothwell's son, William, was born February 19, 1838, he was considered one of the first three white children born in that part of Illinois.

Many of the early settlers came from the state of Ohio. One pioneer from that area was William Johnson, who settled here in 1838 and subsequently moved to a farm on Stillman Valley Road just south of the final Kishwaukee community. Mr. Johnson had a son, Frank, who became responsible for providing most of the employment in the community in later years. He operated a cider press on this farm and also owned a grease factory in Rockford. (To be continued in next issue.)

#### HISTORICAL SOCIETY ACTIVITIES AND MEMBERSHIP

Members of the Rockford Historical Society are asked to mark May 9th on their calendars. That is the date of the next open meeting, and it should be a good one. The program will begin with a short pageant depicting early days in Illinois. This will be followed by a program of slides, shown and narrated by Mr. Stuart Golding, illustrating various historical sites Mr. Golding has visited and photographed throughout Illinois. (Continued on page 6)

Map of the Kishwaukee Community



Members are also asked to check their records to determine whether or not they have paid their 1968 dues. We cannot continue to send NUGGETS OF HISTORY to delinquent members, so if you have not paid for this year, please contact Mrs. Fredriksen, 1140 North Church Street, immediately. May 10th is the deadline!

#### FOUNDER OF DAVIS JUNCTION, ILLINOIS

When Jeremiah Davis retired from farming in 1881, he established his residence at 216 North Second Street, where he continued to live until his death about 1910. The address of the house was 204 when he first moved there, and then was listed as 206 North Second until 1894, at which time much of the house-numbering was changed throughout the city.

Davis was born in Steuben County, New York, on June 2, 1826. At the age of thirteen he was brought by his parents to Milton, Rock County, Wisconsin, where he attended the public schools and Milton Academy.

Mr. Davis' first business effort was the purchase of eighty acres of land which he cultivated until 1850 at which time he made an overland trip to California in company with L. P. Knowlton of Waterloo, Wisconsin. He located a miner's claim near Georgetown, California, which he worked successfully for a year. Having established residence in the territory, he voted for the adoption of the first constitution for California in September of 1850, after which he returned to Milton, Wisconsin.

Davis moved to Ogle County, Illinois, in 1859. When the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Railway was projected in 1874, he laid out and founded the town of Davis Junction, Illinois, which bears his name. He represented Scott Township on the Ogle County Board of Supervisors for eight years, and was a representative from Ogle County in the State Legislature in 1871 and 1872.

After coming to Rockford, Mr. Davis was elected Alderman from the First Ward, serving on the City Council for one term. For a time he was also vice president of the Rockford Woolen Mills.

In the spring of 1852 Mr. Davis married Miss Jane Goodrich, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joseph Goodrich of Milton, Wisconsin. They had six children: J. Milton; Alice, who became Mrs. Gardner Woodman; Henry G., who became a physician, practicing at Monroe Center; Charles E.; Elbert L.; and Mabel, who became Mrs. Theodore W. Van De Mark.

The residence at 216 North Second Street was a large red brick house, built probably in the 1870s or



late 1860s. It was supposedly built by David Keyt, a contractor, although he never lived there himself. James Keyt, a mason, and David Keyt, a carpenter, were in the contracting business together for a time, but David was apparently the actual builder and ran the business. At the time the house was bought by Mr. and Mrs. Davis, it was owned by Dr. G. W. Van Zant, a physician.

At one time a beautiful birch tree dominated the side yard, but one winter its branches were badly broken by ice and snow. Mr. Davis planted several elm trees around the house which shaded it for many years. Mrs. Davis died about 1905, and then daughter Mabel



1229 Charles Street  
(Van De Mark-Magnuson residence)

and her husband, Theodore W. Van De Mark, moved in with Mr. Davis. After the death of Mr. Davis, the Van De Marks continued to live there while they raised their children. Mr. Van De Mark was a salesman for Ashton's Dry Goods store for several years, and later became president of Gilbert Keith Furniture Company as well as serving for a time as County Assessor. Mr. Van De Mark was brought up at 1229 Charles Street. His parents' home, which was located on the present site of the Adamson-Johnson parking lot, later was for many years the home of Mr. and Mrs. Herman Magnuson.



Jeremiah Davis (left) and his friend Thomas Palmer having a serious game of backgammon.

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