

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

November-December, 1968

Volume V, Number 7

"NUGGETS" IS FIVE YEARS OLD!

It was five years ago last October, at a directors' meeting held in president William Barrick's recreation room, that the idea of having a bi-monthly paper was born. The late W. Ashton Johnson, affectionately known to his many friends as "Ash", was appointed editor of the then nameless publication.

The first issue, dated November-December, 1963, was entitled "Nuggets--Old and New". A plea to get ideas for names was made in a short paragraph headed "What shall we name the baby?" A Name Committee was to be selected by president Barrick; however, the designation "Nuggets of History" was presumably chosen by Mr. Johnson himself, possibly with the help of suggestions from others.

Because the first issue was printed in the last month of 1963, the volume numbers have never quite coincided with the calendar year. To overcome this confusion, the present issue is being numbered 7, and Volume 6 will begin with the January-February issue of 1969.

Ash Johnson continued as editor until his death on December 11, 1965. His health never permitted him to accept the presidency of the Rockford Historical Society, but at the annual meeting preceding his death he was elected honorary president, the only person before or since to be honored in this way. Before his death, Mr. Johnson completed a history of Rockford which he hoped would eventually be published. It is still the aspiration of the board of directors that his excellent volume will sometime be offered to the reading public, but as yet there have not been enough available funds to proceed with its publication.

## NEXT MEETING ON FEBRUARY 13

An illustrated slide lecture by Mr. Lowell Anderson of the Illinois State Historical Society will be the program for our next meeting, to be held on Thursday, February 13, at Loreen Hall, 226 South Second Street.

Mr. Anderson has been responsible for the reconstruction and furnishing of the restored Old State Capitol, and his talk will be primarily concerned with that topic. He will be accompanied to the meeting by Mr. Daniel D. Holt, director of field services for the state society. Mr. Holt is responsible for the Spring Tour which will be held in Winnebago County next May, and presumably he will give us a short preview of the tour.

It is hoped that members will mark February 13 on their calendars and plan to attend. With these two men coming all the way from Springfield to be with us, we should have a good turn-out.

MRS. JANETTE GREENLEE GREGORY  
By Hazel M. Hyde

The widow of James O. Gregory, Mrs. Janette Greenlee Gregory, died November 17, 1917. She had been a resident of this area for over eighty years. When three years of age she came to this country from her birthplace in Argyleshire, Scotland, with her parents, John and Helen Brown Greenlee. In 1836 the family located in what is now Argyle and founded what was widely known as the "Scotch Settlement".

Mrs. Gregory was one of the early graduates of Rockford Female Seminary, then operated by Miss Anna P. Sill. She married James O. Gregory of Delevan County, New York, on April 19, 1855. The Gregorys spent ten years on the farm which they owned, and then moved to Belvidere, where Mr. Gregory operated a hardware store for four years.

In 1871, Mr. and Mrs. Gregory located in Rockford. They



purchased the home at 603 Horsman Street, where Mrs. Gregory was living in 1917. Mr. Gregory operated a hardware store on West State Street.

There were three children born to the Gregorys: Helen, Elizabeth, and Wilbur J. Gregory. Mrs. Gregory wrote some of her recollections which were included in a book entitled "The Argyle Settlement in History and Story" by Daniel G. Harvey. The following notes are some of the events and conditions which she described:

"It was in 1836 that Father and his family came from Argyleshire, Scotland, to America, landing in New York City in July. From New York City the route was up the Hudson River to Albany, then across the state to Buffalo by the Erie Canal, thence around the Great Lakes down to Chicago. At Chicago, Father hired two men and their teams and covered wagons to take us to Ottawa, Illinois."

Mrs. Gregory gives as the members of her family besides her parents: Martha, about thirteen years of age; then in order of ages, Elizabeth, George, Charles, herself a baby

of three, and John about one year old. They had brought a servant girl named Christina Galbraith, also.

On the journey they had an encounter with Indians following the breaking of a neck-bow. At first the Indians seemed hostile, but John Greenlee took out his pipe and some tobacco, lighted his own pipe, and gave them all the tobacco he had. They became calmer and directed him to a white man who helped him.

While the family lived in Ottawa, John Greenlee worked on the Aqueduct of the Illinois and Michigan Canal as a mason. In December he came with John Armour and two workmen and located his claim in what was later known as the Scotch Settlement in Winnebago County, Illinois.

It was early the next spring when the Greenlee family moved to a temporary cabin until they could build a more suitable house. This was known as the Armour cabin and was on the east side of a grove of trees. With great insight John Greenlee had brought from Scotland an assortment of tools that would be needed in the new country.

One incident illustrates the bravery of pioneer children. A man by the name of McBride had taken up land a mile and a half from Belvidere. He required the services of John Greenlee to build a chimney. John took his young son George, aged eight and a half years, and walked to the new cabin. The father stayed over night and sent John back home with supplies needed by the family. It was a trackless country of woods and brush without a cabin along the way, and George had only a trail which John Greenlee had blazed with a hatchet as they went along.

Probably on the same trip was the time George was taken by his father to see the burial mound of the Indian, Big Thunder. The Indians buried their dead above ground in a sitting position, dressed in blanket and headdress, surrounded by a palisade of heavy split pickets to keep out wild beasts. The place Belvidere was located had been known as Squaw Prairie and was a favorite summer camping ground for the Winnebago Indians.

Other reminiscences dealt with securing supplies. Sometimes they purchased supplies in Chicago or Ottawa. Wild game was abundant. On one occasion, while working in the grove, they traced bees to a hollow tree filled with honey.

The wild life of the area, the song birds, and the flowers were described in detail. A favorite haunt of the deer was some hazel brush where Willow Creek Church now stands.

John Greenlee had been born on August 16, 1791, at Southend, Argyleshire, Scotland. He was of an ancient family located in the parish of Lochrannoch, Renfrewshire, Scotland. About 1820 he married Helen Brown, the daughter of Charles Brown and Elizabeth Ralston Brown. Their story was told in a poem published by Rev. James Breckenridge of Streetsville, Canada. The oral tradition and the poem were supported by a legal document found in Scotland. It appeared that John Greenlee had leased a farm five miles north of Campbeltown, known as the Park Farm, in Scotland. Through a series of crop failures he was unable to pay his rent in full. The Duke of Argyle's agent caused his stock



and farm implements to be sold at auction but this did not satisfy the debt.

Mr. Greenlee's nephews, the Armours, had come to America and located at Ottawa, Illinois. Word came that they were eager to have Helen and John Greenlee and their family join them. It was a custom for the Scotch tradesmen to go to the farm to outfit a family. The shoemaker who went to the Park Farm to help the Greenlees get ready to make the trip was James Armour, the father of the young men already in America.

When the family started for America they were met in Liverpool by Hugh Gould, land steward of the Duke of Argyle, who took John Greenlee back to Campbelltown to imprison him. He managed to make an escape and secured a lady's long cloak and hood for a disguise. He spent some time in Southend at the home of his brother-in-law, John Ralston, Elder. John Thompson, father of Robert and John of Caledonia, and another man helped him escape in a row boat under cover of a heavy fog.

After four weeks on the ocean trip, John Greenlee arrived in New York ahead of his wife and family and was on the dock to welcome them. When the family was reunited they left New York, going to Buffalo, where they remained for a time with friends, then to Chicago. It was early autumn of 1836 when they went by wagon to Ottawa, Illinois.

John Greenlee, John Armour, and two helpers set out for the Armour claim in December of 1836. The weather was cold and the streams were hard to cross. They built a 14 x 14 foot cabin of logs on the north side of the grove. The Scotch Grove lay between the two branches of Willow Creek and was partly in Winnebago County, but mostly in Boone County. The men returned to Ottawa to await the end of winter. During the winter of 1836-37, John Greenlee worked as a mason on the Illinois and Michigan Canal.

The Greenlee family went to the Armour claim in March, 1837, and occupied the Armour cabin. There was no door and a woolen blanket was hung across the doorway to keep out the cold. The family had neither oxen nor wagon. Mr. Greenlee carried a sack of corn on one occasion to a mill at Newberg, on the Kishwaukee River, to have it ground into meal.

The first white man to call at the cabin was Horace

Dyer, who later settled at the spring, about a mile west of Argyle. A few weeks after their arrival, the Greenlees heard someone chopping wood, and upon investigation found Henry and Charles Babcock, who had taken up a claim. This claim was later the Alexander McNair and John Ralston farms. Soon the Enoch family located on the south side of Guilford.

In the summer of 1838, John Greenlee took up a claim for himself. It was the land adjoining the Armour claim on the west. During the summer he prepared the logs for a new double cabin. He made a wagon of hard wood having solid wheels and he purchased a team of oxen. He made also a sled of wood to haul logs and bought a horse to draw it. When it came time to build the cabin and to move, he had the help of the Babcocks and the Enochs.

The first child born in the colony was Ellen Greenlee, born in Scotch Grove, June 27, 1837. She later became Mrs. James Ralston of Guilford.

John Greenlee died in Belvidere, Boone County, December 30, 1882. Mrs. Greenlee died March 18, 1865, at Argyle, Winnebago County. They contributed much to the settlement in the years following their pioneer beginnings in the settlement.

MILWAUKEE BRICK IN ROCKFORD  
(Reprinted from the ROCKFORD GAZETTE  
dated October 1, 1868)

By a discovery recently made, it seems probable that the term "Milwaukee Brick" will have to give way to "Rockford Brick." A large and apparently inexhaustible bed of clay has been discovered upon the property of Mr. Robert Clark, some four miles up the river, from which brick can be made, even surpassing the celebrated product of Milwaukee, of a light yellow color, indeed, almost white. We have a "specimen brick" upon our editorial desk. We understand that their manufacture will be largely entered into in the spring, and we hope ere long to see many of the old rookeries which disgrace our streets, replaced by beautiful piles of these handsome brick.

FAST-GROWING ROCKFORD  
By Colleen Mikkelson

Sunday, August 24, 1834, a mud-splattered rattling lumber wagon loaded with business-like paraphernalia, carrying four men, came over the hills of what is now the western part of Rockford, and gazed feelingly at the beautiful Rock River, lighted by the rays of the sun.

Thatcher Blake, Germanicus Kent, and two others were the four who settled the region of this beautiful river. The first work done by these pioneers was the erection of a

cabin 12 by 14 feet, which was soon completed. Next preparations were undertaken for the erection of a saw mill. The timber was taken from the land which later became the grounds of Rockford College. And so the four men spent the winter of 1834-35 in a new home.

Kent's settlement was not long without settlers for on April 9, 1835, when the ice on the river had become weakened by the mild weather, Daniel Shaw Haight, a native of New York, selected a claim on the east side of the river. Haight returned to Geneva, but returned to his new tract in May, bringing his wife and children, his sister-in-law, and a hired man.

And so the little settlement grew. By the fall of 1835 its population numbered 27. The little town, first known as Midway, was a popular stopping place for travelers going from Chicago to Galena. At Midway, wayfarers might pause to eat wild duck cooked in the New England fashion by the wives of this little group of Yankee settlers. If they arrived at dusk, "Log Cabin" hospitality assured them of the comfort of a straw bag in the attic for the night. Midway's principal claim to importance was that it overlooked one of the best crossings of the swiftly flowing Rock River, a place where water ran shallow and crystal clear over a bottom of solid rock. This crossing was known to Indians and scouts as Rock ford.

The little town of Midway became Rockford. Though once a settlement of twenty-seven, it has grown to be the second largest city in Illinois, with a population of over one hundred thirty-two thousand. Once a mill city, it now has nearly six hundred manufacturing establishments. In less than 140 years Rockford has grown to become a large industrial city.

#### A 1946 INTERVIEW WITH WILLIAM H. ZIOCK, JR.

By Hazel M. Hyde

On June 20, 1946, Mr. William H. Ziock, Jr., then president of Ziock Industries from the year 1905, gave an interview to Miss Hazel M. Mortimer. The interview took place at 417 South Wyman Street, and the information was to be used in a thesis for Northwestern University. The talk was followed by a trip through the plant at 418 South Wyman Street, with explanations being made by Mr. J. H. Bodorff.

Rockford Mitten Company was started for the purpose of making woolen goods, according to Mr. Ziock. Mr. William Talcott and Mr. Ralph Emerson had furnished funds for the Nelson Company, which made only cotton socks, and they were part of the new organization. Mr. Munthie, who at the time was interested in the Price Glove Company, was a friend of Mr. John Nelson when the machine was made, so he became interested in the new concern. Mr. W. H. Ziock, Sr., had a woolen mill in St. Charles, Missouri, and furnished yarn for the Rockford Mitten Company for making the mittens. He came to Rockford quite often and became interested because

he had some Nelson machines for making cotton socks in St. Charles, Missouri. They finally merged the two companies in 1855. The woolen mill was moved to Rockford. Mr. Ziock came and brought his full crew from St. Charles. The name was changed to Rockford Mitten and Hosiery Company.

According to Ford F. Rowe, the Rockford Mitten and Hosiery Company was organized by the Nelsons in 1881. In 1885, W. H. Ziock, Sr., became president. W. H. Ziock, Jr. succeeded as president after the death of his father in 1905. He organized the Ziock Industries somewhat later.

Mr. J. H. Bodorff explained as the trip was taken: Rockford Mitten and Hosiery Company had 65 years of experience (in 1946) since its establishment in 1881. Its raw materials purchased by experts from all over the world were spun into yarn in the factory. A trip through the factory showed the care exercised from selecting the samples, through raw stock room, dyeing, drying, picking, carding, and spinning processes. After spinning the yarn on their own looms, it was conditioned and processed. Knitting, inspecting, boarding, and hand matching the pairs to size explained the uniformity of the Rockford quality.

Mr. Ziock stated that the water power was of no importance in locating the Rockford Mitten and Hosiery Company. The factory had its own steam power until electricity came into use. He said that this plant had a diversified line of products including hosiery and cloth. They made men's woolsens, dress goods and shirtings, and automobile upholstery.

#### JOHN NELSON AND THE KNITTING INDUSTRY

We are indebted to Mrs. Eleanor Trenholm Overfield for the interesting photograph on page eight. Taken about 1924 as indicated by the vintage of the horseless carriages, the home on the left was 309 South First Street, the last residence of John Nelson, inventor of the knitting machine which formed the nucleus of the Nelson Knitting Company. The house on the right was 303 South First Street, home of former Probate Judge Fred E. Carpenter, as well as his father, Howard Carpenter, and his grandfather, Hiram Carpenter. Both buildings, as well as all others in the same block, have been razed for a parking lot. John Nelson died in 1883, and in 1893 the Nelson home was purchased by Alex M. Trenholm, Mrs. Overfield's grandfather. The following account of John Nelson's activities is taken from Ernst W. Olson's book, THE SWEDISH ELEMENT IN ILLINOIS (1917):

"John Nelson was born in Karrakra, Vestergotland, Sweden, April 5, 1830. When a young lad, he lost his father by death. The widowed mother was left with but little of this world's goods, but, being a woman of more than ordinary intelligence, she succeeded well in providing for herself and family. The son John seemed born with mechanical talent, and when quite young became a maker of spinning wheels. He remained in the place of his birth until twenty-two years of age, when he left for the United States. He



arrived in Chicago in the spring of the year 1852 and stopped there a few weeks, going in turn to St. Charles and Rockford the same year. Being obliged to take whatever work was offered, he left shortly for Elgin and worked on the railroad, returning to Rockford after several months. After a siege of sickness he again left for Elgin, and then went to Chicago, where he worked for a time as a turner and joiner. In 1854 we find him back in Rockford, but two years later he established a cabinetmaker's shop in Sycamore, continuing in business there for a year. In 1857 he finally located permanently in Rockford. After being employed as a woodworker for a time, he opened a turner's and cabinet-maker's shop of his own. From now on John Nelson began to ponder on various mechanical problems. One of these was solved by the invention of a dovetailing machine, which was in use for many years, first in Nelson's own shop and afterwards in the sash, door and blind factory operated by John Nelson, A. C. Johnson and Gust Hollem about 1865. About the same time Nelson was associated with one Berglund in a similar enterprise in Water Valley, Miss., but when the latter betrayed the confidence placed in him, Nelson abandoned the undertaking in disgust, leaving valuable machinery in Berglund's possession without any compensation.

"In 1866 John Nelson associated himself with William Worth Burson, inventor of the grain binder, whose numerous patents on harvester machinery were acquired by the McCormick, Deering, Whitely, Walter A. Wood, Plano, and Milwaukee harvester companies. The two concentrated their genius on the task of inventing a family knitting machine.

"After much tedious labor on the part of both men, a power machine was perfected, on which patents were issued in 1868, 1870 and 1875."

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