

NUGGETS of HISTORY

January-February, 1969

Volume VI, Number 1

DELBERT E. TRAHERN

We are indebted to Mr. and Mrs. Harold L. O'Donnell of Cayuga, Indiana, for the picture of Mrs. O'Donnell's parents' home at 323 Whitman Street as it appeared many years ago. Mrs. O'Donnell, the former Helen Trahern, is the daughter of the late Mr. and Mrs. Delbert E. Trahern.

The Trahern home was built in 1910, according to Mr. O'Donnell, and replaced a stone house which had previously stood there, using part of the same foundation. However, the stone house had faced North Main Street, and the Windsor Apartments at 902-910 North Main are located in what was the front yard of the old stone house.

The frame house located at 315 Whitman Street originally faced North Main and its house number was 904. In the 1902 Rockford city directory, W. C. Taft was listed at 904 North Main Street, but in 1903 he was at 315 Whitman, so apparently the house was moved at that time.

Delbert E. Trahern, Mrs. O'Donnell's father, was born on January 11, 1860, to Frank B. and Martha Reader Trahern. Frank Trahern and his brother, William D. Trahern, had come to Rockford in 1848. The following year William established himself in the foundry business, and Frank worked with him as a machinist, mechanic, and foreman. The firm, known at one time as Trahern and Stuart, and later as Trahern and Dales, manufactured such products as threshing machines,



Delbert Trahern Home, 323 Whitman Street, Years Ago



pumps, castings, line shaftings, pulleys, and gears.

William Trahern died in 1883, and Frank organized his own brass foundry which developed into the Rockford Brass Works. William's son, Oscar P. Trahern, continued his father's firm, calling it the Trahern Pump Company. When Frank Trahern died about 1903, Delbert and his younger brother, Harvey R. Trahern, continued the Rockford Brass Company, Delbert serving as president and Harvey as secretary and later treasurer. They also organized the Rockford Well Drilling Company, which they operated until about 1909. In addition they held the positions of president and vice president respectively of the Rockford Iron Works, a continuation of the Utter Manufacturing Company. At the time Delbert Trahern died on March 8, 1948, he was president of the George H. Spengler Company and vice president of the W. A. Whitney Manufacturing Company.

THE ROCK RIVER AND ROCKFORD

By H. Bruce Olson

The Rock River Valley has been a favorite spot of many different people who spoke many different languages. Thus, the Rock River, as it is known today, has had several different names.

It was called Sinnissippi by the Illinois and Sauk Indians. Even the Indians, however, had several different ways of spelling the river's name. Among these ways of spelling it were Assenisipi, Ossinisipi, and Sinsepe.

In 1784 Thomas Jefferson proposed a plan by which, if passed, would have a portion of the territory "...through which the Assenisipi, or Rock River, runs, shall be called Assenisipia."

If this plan had passed, there would be three states where there is now one. These states were to be called Polypotamia, Illinois, and Assenisipia. If the proposal had carried, there probably would be no Rockford, since Assenisipi was the Indian name for Rock River. The combined form would thus not likely have been Rock-ford, but Asseniford or something else.

The reason Jefferson's plan lost had little to do with

geography. Rather, it contained a clause prohibiting slavery in the territory after 1800, and this point failed to get a majority.

The Rock River Valley was a favored spot of the French. The river was called Rivere de la Roche on early maps. It was the water artery by which French fur traders and hunters penetrated far into the Illinois country, where they bartered with the Indians for many types of animal skins. Fur traders would transport their canoe loads of furs up the Rock River. By portage they would proceed down the Wisconsin and the Mississippi.

It was also a favored site of the Indians. In 1828, President Adams opened the fertile lands at the mouth of the Rock River to settlement. The Sauk village there had been abandoned except by Quashquame and the Indian band led by Black Hawk. The other Indians which had dwelled in that village had been led to new lands west of the Mississippi. Black Hawk followed only after Governor Reynolds on May 26, 1831, called on the militia for 700 mounted men to move the Indian chief from Illinois.

Black Hawk loved his native Rock River Valley, and the urge to return was more than he could resist. With about 2000 Sauks, including women and children, he recrossed the Mississippi into Illinois on April 6, 1832.

A volunteer army of 2000 was recruited, and on May 9, 1832, it was set in motion at the mouth of the Rock River. Black Hawk headed north and the troops followed.

Black Hawk surrendered on August 12, 1832, after a campaign that had lasted seventy-nine days. Chief Black Hawk said, as he and his followers were exiled from the valley, "The Rock River country is beautiful country. I loved it. I fought for it. It is now yours. Keep it as we did."

Eastern settlers turned their eyes to the Rock River Valley when they read about the end of the war. Many headed west to claim the fertile lands waiting for the first white man to set foot on them.

Shortly after the end of the war with Black Hawk, in 1834 to be exact, three men came to the point where a creek, later to be called Kent Creek, flowed into the Rock River. These three men, Germanicus Kent, Thatcher Blake, and a negro slave, Lewis Lemon Kent, decided that this was the ideal spot for which they had been searching; a site midway between Chicago and Galena which was suitable for a sawmill.

In 1835 Daniel Haight built a cabin near the Kent-Blake settlement but on the east side of the river. When Winnebago County was organized in 1839, the two settlements joined and became incorporated as a village with a population of 236

It was the river which caused the settlers to stop here. Also, it was the water power of this river which caused Rockford to become a manufacturing center.

Early settlers at once realized the usefulness of this water power and tried to harness it. However, these early dams were not very strong. In January of 1835 a sudden thaw broke up the ice when it was sixteen inches thick.

This swept away the dam across Kent's Creek.

By an act of legislature, the Rockford Hydraulic and Manufacturing Company was incorporated on February 28, 1843, and was authorized to construct a dam across the Rock River which would raise the water level to seven feet. The act required the company to construct locks as the river was considered navigable. This dam was completed in 1845.

In 1846 the west end of the dam went out, but this was soon repaired. In 1847 the east end of the dam went out. This was also repaired, and water power was available until June 1, 1851, when the entire dam went out.

The navigability of the Rock River is to be debated, however. It has been considered navigable for about one half of its length. The river was navigable to a much greater extent in the middle 1800s than today. Even in 1900 the volume of water was considered to be two or three times less than in the 1800s. Today water in the river itself and its tributaries has diminished a great deal more, probably to only a third of that in historic times.

Because of this poor navigability, only one half of its length, a mass meeting was held on January 11, 1840, to seek a congressional grant to improve the Rock River as a navigable stream. There was even talk of connecting Rockford and Aurora by canal.

Early Rockford citizens soon found they needed a way to cross the Rock River, so in September of 1836 the Winnebago County Court granted a license to Germanicus Kent to establish a ferry where the State street bridge now stands. He was required to pay a fee of ten dollars for the license. Rates of ferriage were established and in effect until the town was incorporated, at which time he was paid by the village treasurer; and all crossing was free.

Later, bridges were built, and, as with the dams, several attempts failed and were borne away by the swift currents of the Rock River. To date there are seven bridges spanning the Rock River within the Rockford city limits.

Rockford has grown to be Illinois' second largest city, the most important, industrially, along the Rock River. The river remains an important source of power, as plants along the river are able to secure as much as sixty per cent of their electric power from the energy of the river.

NORTH BURRITT CEMETERY
By Hazel M. Hyde

When skies are blue and the breeze is crisp, a visit to North Burrirt Cemetery brings a certain sense of history. Much local history can be found engraved on the older stones. Here has been preserved the story of Burrirt Community. Names of early settlers can be deciphered; but sometimes this requires the use of chalk rubbed over the time-eroded surfaces.

As chairman of the Rockford Chapter DAR Genealogical Records Committee in search of a rewarding project, we found that recording the stones of this cemetery proved challeng-



ing. The actual recording and compiling was done by Mrs. Harold Pedersen, Mrs. F. M. Vaccaro, and Mrs. Harold Hyde. Results may be seen in the Rockford Public Library in the new genealogical and local history room. Several trips to the cemetery were necessary and the equipment is simple: clip board, paper, pencil, small garden trowel, and a pocket full of chalk. The garden trowel helps to push back the intruding grass on a stone flush with the ground.

The North Burrirt Cemetery is also known as Burrirt Union Cemetery. It must not be confused with a smaller cemetery known as South Burrirt Cemetery. North Burrirt Cemetery is on Cemetery Road about one and one-half mile north of Trask Bridge Road, at the north end of Wempleton Road, and the whole distance from Rockford is about six and one-half miles. The custodian of the records is Mrs. Harold Crandall, whose address is Route 2, Cemetery Road,



Toolhouse in North Burrirt Cemetery; Note Old Pump at Right

Winnebago, Illinois. Records of the names of persons interred have not been complete, but there is a complete list of lot owners. A recent plat map has been made by Mrs. Crandall's son. A notebook shows where graves have been located. The cemetery is well cared for and its caretaker is friendly. The custodian of records is helpful and cooperative. There is a U-shaped drive that makes entrance and exit easy.

Inscriptions on the stones provided much interest since they range from simple "At Rest" or poetry to statements concerning the deceased. A brief line, "The best husband a woman ever had" held a world of pathos.

Side by side were two stones with similar inscriptions. One stated: Father Alexander Sarver 1847-1944 At rest in the fields he loved to cultivate for 80 of his 96½ years life span. The other read: Mother Sarah Sarver 1846-1933 At rest in the garden she loved and tended for 45 years. There are many different Sarver families. Major Wm. H. Sarver's resting place had in addition to the stone a Spanish War Veteran Marker years 1898-1902: Cuba, Philippine Islands, and Porto Rico.

Names of early families, many of whom are still in the area, included: Clikeman, Scott, Oliver, Andrew, Knapp, Conklin, Todd, Christen and others. Some stones gave the nativity as: John McPherson born Feb. 10, 1821 - Died Oct. 1, 1893; and Ellen McPherson, his wife, born Dec. 13, 1821 Died April 30, 1885; they also had the notation: Natives of Bannockburn, Scotland. One fine custom for the historian or genealogist was that of giving the wife's maiden name in many cases, as, for example: Lena M. Scott wife of Willis J. Boomer 1877-1899.

Many flags were to be seen, and there were soldiers from the Civil War, Spanish-American War, World Wars I and II, and others. Military inscriptions were usually very specific, as: Ira Daniel Knight--Illinois SFC Utilities Det QMC --World War I--Born Aug. 30, 1887--Died Dec. 20, 1964.

No effort was made to check for the oldest date. Some very old ones were: Alonzo W. McDougall Dec. 7, 1856 - Feb. 15, 1858; Peter Knight, Soldier of War of 1812 Born June 7, 1794 - Died July 11, 1865; Elizabeth, wife of G. Swindells Died Nov. 28, 1851 age 33 years; Rebecca, wife of Joseph Hilton died Nov. 5, 1859 aged 72 years "Rest mother, rest, in sweet sleep while hearts in sorrow are bowed"; Margret J. Cox died Aug. 4, 1847; Eliza wife of Benj. Trenholm died May 21, 1837 aged 44 yrs 11 mos 2 das. Some stones were partly underground, undecipherable, or broken. The oldest sections A-B-C-D-E are in the south, center, and east parts of the tract.

Unusual names were: Milcah, Orvie, Adella, Matilda, Candace, Garnet, Hortatio, Thania, Urzilla, Elrova, Medora, Walderman, Evore, Hortense and Adelbert. However, plain names like George, William, Charles, Robert, Clara, Sadie, and Edith are more numerous.

In the older areas there were many large family monuments in the shape of high columns with names on all four sides and in some cases there were also headstones with the

same names. In the newer section the double stone for husband and wife was rather frequently used. Some stones had birth date and no date for death, so it could be assumed some of these persons are yet living.

Researchers can find the data as it was copied in twelve different libraries, in the genealogical sections. There are approximately 80 typed pages copied in the order the information was found; but alphabetized at the back. This volunteer work was intended as a service but due to human error and the difficulty of reading old stones, interested persons are advised to use the report as a "clue" and then make a visit in person to Burritt Cemetery.

REAR ADMIRAL GEORGE JOHN DUFEK
By Marcus Grimes

Among great Illinois citizens living today is Rear Admiral George John Dufek, retired from the United States Navy, and past Commander of Operations Deep-Freeze I, II, and III. Admiral Dufek was born in Rockford, Illinois, on February 10, 1903, the son of Frank and Mary Dufek. While growing up in Rockford, he attended the Peterson Elementary School and Rockford Central High School. George Dufek then went east to the United States Naval Academy and received his Bachelor of Science degree there in 1925. His study and training continued, and by 1933, he was one of the few Navy men to be qualified in both submarines and airplanes. He later received honorary degrees from Carlton College, LeMoyn College, and Rockford College.

In the United States Navy, Dufek found the career he wanted and worked his way up from a Commander Ensign in 1925 aboard the U.S.S. Maryland to the rank of Rear Admiral in 1955, Commander of Operations Deep-Freeze I, II, and III. It was in 1938-39 that Dufek became the navigator on the U.S.S. Bear, Byrd's flagship of the Antarctic Development Project. This provided his first experience with the frozen world. It left him with vivid memories and a wish to return.

World War II intervened, and George Dufek served in the Mediterranean. Then followed command of the aircraft carrier Bogue and six destroyers--a hunter-killer group that sank the last German submariner in the war. Later in the Korean War, he was Commander of the aircraft carrier Antietam.

Next came the experiences that were to qualify Dufek as the Navy's top "cold weather" expert. Setting up and supplying weather stations in the northern Polar regions occupied much time in the late '40s.

Then, "Early in 1950, a small group of American scientists met in Washington, D.C. They talked about making a study of the earth in which all nations, or as many as possible, would take part at the same time" -- an international Geophysical Year. It was noted that in 1958 there would be unusual sunspot activity, and that this might prove in-

Admiral Dufek's Birthplace
1114 Seventeenth Avenue

Admiral Dufek's Childhood Home
1410 Sixteenth Avenue



teresting for all to study. The scientists became more excited as they talked. They said it would be good in this world of tension for nations to cooperate and study and learn together. The year of 1957-58 was selected and agreed upon by the International Council of Scientific Unions at their 1952 meeting. But the year was to be 18 months in length and to begin July 1, 1957. This international Geophysical Year would be known as "IGY" for short. More than 60 nations participated, and 10,000 scientists and assistants worked on the project.

The Antarctic was only one part of the world to play a role in the IGY, but it was the most important. Each nation was responsible for building its own scientific stations, and our Secretary of Defense agreed to set up the five needed Antarctic stations, with the Navy taking the responsibility. George Dufek was chosen for the command, because of his service record, interest, and leadership ability.

While planning the operation, the Navy needed a code name. First it was "Long Haul", but later it was changed to "Operation Deep-Freeze" -- a name that Admiral Dufek thought gave his men spirit.

Admiral Dufek was in command of Task Force 43, whose mission was to settle the Antarctic in Operation Deep-Freeze I from December, 1955, to March, 1956. They were to build five scientific stations for occupancy by July 1, 1957. Seven ships and 1,800 men were to be used. Admiral Dufek came to the building area by plane, the first to land on wheels in Antarctica. Dog teams parachuted, supplies were brought in by ship, and everything was under control. The workers studied penguins, set up buildings (including a church), and finally had their mission accomplished. The bases at McMurdo Sound were self-supporting. There was an air of good feeling around the camp, of a job well done.

(Continued in next issue)

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published bi-monthly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois. Editor: Robert H. Borden. Associate Editor: Hazel M. Hyde. Address correspondence to Editor, NUGGETS OF HISTORY, 1325 Cospers Avenue, Rockford, Illinois 61107. Telephone number: 968-6700.