

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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A COSTLY HOME

(Reprinted from THE ROCKFORD DAILY REGISTER
of February 3, 1890)

Will Nelson Buys the John P. Manny Homestead, Paying There-
for \$20,000 --- An Elegant Residence.

For some time negotiations have been pending for the sale of the John P. Manny Homestead to Will Nelson, the wealthy young manufacturer.

Saturday evening the deal was practically closed, through A. D. Early acting as Mr. Nelson's attorney.

Mr. Nelson buys the place for a home, and will shortly move from his present residence at the foot of Third Street. The price paid was \$20,000, and it is regarded as cheap property at that price. The grounds are very sightly, there being frontage of 169 feet on North Main Street. By the purchase Mr. Nelson secures one of the most elegant pieces of residence property in the city.



Editor's Note: The Manny-Nelson home, now the Burpee Art Gallery, is shown here. Will this historic home soon be razed?

IT WILL BE A TUG

(Reprinted from THE ROCKFORD DAILY REGISTER
of February 4, 1890)

When the first of April comes and John P. Manny and his good family get their domestic belongings packed preparatory to removing their household Penates from the generous old homestead, it will be no small wrench at the heart-strings. When John P. Manny bought the property twenty-six years ago from John Coleman, the mansion loomed up amid a thicket of trees and underbrush. The house, it is true, was there, but the present pretty and attractive surroundings were missing. Only a single foot-path led from Main Street up to the house. There was no grassy terrace

sloping down to the bank of the river, no winding drive, no boat-house, no hammocks swung from the giant trees. It took years of labor to bring the grounds to their artistic and delightful appearance.

Mr. Manny stated in conversation this morning that he bought the property 26 years ago this spring from John Coleman, father of Chas. Coleman. He was then lying on his death bed, and the end came in the summer. Mr. Manny took possession in the fall. The premises cost him \$15,000 and he says he has no doubt that he has expended fully \$15,000 in the improvement of house and grounds since. In other words, the entire property has cost him about \$30,000, though he now sells it for \$20,000.

"But I have had a good many years service out of it," he added.

"What are your plans when you remove?" was asked.

"I have not formed any as yet," said the gentleman. "Can't say whether I will build or not. I have to deliver over the house to its new owners by April 1, and by that time I may have my plans perfected. I understand that Mr. Nelson and his mother will make their home there."

A HOUSE WITH WHITE COLUMNS By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

A historic white house with tall white columns stands on a hill on Summer Street. Over sixty years it has topped this hill with its doorway from which hospitality seems to emanate.



Passersby are heard to wonder about the house. Descendants of its former occupants, the Chandler Starr family, still live in Rockford.

Blanche E. Starr (Mrs. Chandler Starr) said of her home, located at 405 Summer Street, that she had instructed the architect to draw up the plans that had features of

three buildings that were favorites of hers. They were the New York State Building at the fair of 1893, the Petit Trianon of Marie Antoinette, and the Capitol at Washington, D. C.

Among the celebrities and guests in the home of Mrs. Starr was the Italian coloratura, who, in 1936, sang "Rigoletto" in Rockford with the artists, orchestra, chorus, and crew of the Chicago Opera Company. Mme. Elizabetha Rosamore expressed her admiration for the impressive white

mansion. Mrs. Starr explained that her home had been built to suit her own taste and convenience. She was happy that it incorporated features of some of her favorite architecture.

Through the years many men and women, famous in the musical world, and local persons interested in the cause of music, have been entertained in the Starr home. Among these were Fanny Bloomfield Zisler, Chicago pianist; American composer Edward MacDowell and his wife, who was Mr. Starr's cousin; Mme. Teresa Carreno, Venezuelan opera singer, composer and pianist, who wrote the Venezuelan national anthem; Percy Grainger, pianist-composer, who practiced on the Starr grand piano when he was in Rockford for several days; Emil Liebling, a famous Chicago piano-composer with whom Mrs. Starr studied piano; and Harrison Wild, organist and choral director, with whom she studied organ.

Cora Blanche Ellis Starr was born September 26, 1854, at Felecity, Ohio. She was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Edward F. W. Ellis. Her father, born in Maine, had been teaching school in Ohio while continuing his law studies. He married Ann Dobbys, a Kentucky girl, who was one of his pupils. In the spring of 1850 Mr. Ellis had followed the forty-niners to California, where he was elected to the first legislature. He sponsored a bill granting property rights to women of California.

In California Edward Ellis met Dr. Dexter Clark and Charles Spafford from Rockford. After his return to Ohio, he decided to take the advice of these two men and to settle in Rockford, Illinois. The Ellis family moved here in 1855. Blanche Ellis' father and his two California friends formed the banking firm of Spafford, Clark and Ellis.

Edward Ellis and his family lived in a comfortable home on West State Street, just west of Avon Street. Blanche Ellis was seven years old when her father was killed in action at Shiloh in the War Between the States. At the outbreak of the war he had organized a company of the Ellis Rifles for the 15th Illinois Regiment. A lieutenant-colonel, he was serving as acting colonel and commanding the 15th regiment on the Shiloh battlefield when he was killed. The death of Colonel Ellis left Mrs. Ellis a widow with four children.

Blanche Ellis was only fourteen when she played the cabinet organ in the Episcopalian church. After studying organ with Professor Daniel Hood of Rockford College she became organist at Second Congregational Church, a post she held for twenty-nine years. As a girl of sixteen she began to teach music. She walked from one side of the river to the other to give piano lessons for twenty-five cents.

The Jubilee celebration of the fiftieth year of Blanche Ellis Starr's graduation in 1869 in music from Rockford Female Academy, later Rockford College, was held in June of 1919. The founder and first president of Rockford Mendelssohn Club was honored guest of Rockford College Music Alumnae. These were eight members of the class. Mrs. Starr's life history is interwoven with the history of Mendelssohn Club and the growth of musical interest and activity in Rockford. Her husband was interested in his wife's

musical ventures.

Chandler Starr was born April 29, 1851, on the old Starr homestead in a house which was located on what would later become North Main Street. There was no North Main Street and the road ran along the Rock River. He was the son of Melancthon Starr and Lucretia Nevins Starr. Mr. Starr had two brothers, Henry N. and David N., and three sisters, Florida, Elizabeth, and Lucretia. The father was a Rockford pioneer who organized, with T. D. Robertson, the Winnebago National Bank as the city's first bank. This bank merged with Rockford National Bank in 1921.

The son, Chandler, was educated here and began, at the age of 21, as a clerk in the old Winnebago National Bank. He continued in the banking business for over 58 years, becoming vice president of the Rockford National Bank and also vice president of the Rockford Trust Company.

Blanche Ellis, the daughter of Colonel E. F. W. Ellis, was a classmate of Chandler Starr in the grade school then called Lincoln but now known as Franklin School. These two remained in the same class through grade school and high school, and graduated together from Rockford High School. Upon graduation, Mr. Starr went east to complete his education at East Hampton College in Massachusetts.

On January 1, 1874, Chandler Starr and Blanche Ellis were married. Their first home was a double house at 914



North Main built by Mr. Starr and A. C. Deming. They occupied this house for twenty-six years before building the mansion now associated with the Starrs.

Mr. and Mrs. Starr had only one daughter, Mrs. William S. Miller. There were two grandsons, Chandler Starr Miller of the Rockford Historical Society, and William Forbes Miller, and three great grandchildren, William Forbes Miller, Jr.; Leigh Allen Frisbie Miller; and Norma Starr Miller.

When the Starrs built their beautiful white mansion on top of the hill, at the corner of North Church Street and Summer Street, in 1906, it was in a completely unsettled portion of Rockford. It was considered to be out in the

country.

On Thursday afternoon, October 4, 1884, Mrs. Chandler Starr invited twenty women to her home. They discussed the advisability of meeting fortnightly to listen to each other play and sing. The members would take their sewing and fancy work and keep the meetings informal. This was the beginning of the Mendelssohn Club of Rockford. Mrs. Starr was the first president and continued in the presidency for many years.

Outgrowing the homes of the members, the musical organization moved its meeting place to Court Street Methodist Church. Later its quarters were at 317 Mulberry Street. Concerts and programs were given in the Rockford Theatre. At last the Mendelssohn Club had its own building on North Church Street. Near the south entry-way there is a portrait of Mrs. Chandler Starr, who seems to greet those who enter. It is very fitting that she seems to preside over the building devoted to music and culture, which had its beginning in her home on top of a hill on Summer Street.

CORRECTION PLEASE!

Hazel A. Kluck has called the editor's attention to an error in the final installment of her article, "Dreams Come True for Two Society Members", which appeared in the last issue. On page six some lines were omitted in the process of printing, with the result being one paragraph where there should have been two. The first two complete paragraphs on page six should read as follows:

"On Sunday, June 29, Erma and I had parallel thrills--attending the church of our ancestors: Erma at historic Christ Church, and I at St. Peters.

"On July 1, Erma, Diane, and Bruce came to pick me up. We spent that night and the next forenoon at Gettysburg and the Country Store at Biglerville, which is certainly like turning back the clock. Then it was back to the Turnpike headed west."

NEW DESIGN SPARKED ROCKFORD FURNITURE INDUSTRY By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

The Rockford-made combination book case and desk is given credit for pumping a new vitality into the Rockford Furniture industry in the early eighties. Claims have been made that the launching of the new combination established Rockford as an important furniture center. It was first introduced by the Central Furniture Company. Production jumped from a few cases a day to hundreds in a remarkably short time. Then, from about 1882 to 1900 all the factories began to devote almost their entire output to the making of this one product. For about twenty years carloads of this type of furniture were shipped out daily. About a million of these cases were made in Rockford factories.

The story, while simple, appears fantastic when reviewed after decades of time. Charles Cohoes, then a salesman for Central Furniture, came home from a trip to demand a distinctly new piece of furniture to sell. The idea was presented to Robert Bauch, the designer for the Central Furniture Company.

Mr. Bauch is quoted as saying in 1930, "I was sitting down with a pencil in my hand and sketching something when all at once the idea came to me to combine a bookcase and a writing desk. I made a rough sketch and turned out the first model."

It was August P. Peterson, secretary of Central Furniture Company, who recognized the possibilities of the new sales item. He advertised and pushed the sales until the combination bookcase and desk won the greatest popularity ever received by a piece of furniture.

The combination became an all purpose addition to the home, providing a mirror for daily use in an age when mirrors were uncommon. The drawers provided storage space. The shelves were sufficient for the average householder's entire library. The desk was convenient for keeping the family accounts or writing letters. A model of the combination bookcase that was very popular has been preserved in Erlander Museum. A few older Rockford families still prize these as family heirlooms. The locally-designed cases sold for prices ranging from six dollars and fifty cents to sixty dollars. The model in most demand was probably one turned out by Union Furniture Company and priced at seventeen dollars and fifty cents. It is estimated ten thousand cases of that particular style were sold.

The designer of the first of these remarkable cases was later connected with West End Furniture Company as a designer. Mr. Bauch recalled in later years, "There were fights galore among the workmen and bloody noses several times a week." The problem, he explained, was that all of the workmen were stockholders. No one wanted to be told he must perform one of the dirtier jobs, feeling he was just as important as anyone else. "They put me in as superintendent at Central Furniture Company without the power to discharge," he stated. It was three years before he received the needed power to serve a severance notice on a workman who would not obey orders concerning his job.

Robert Bauch, who by 1892 was superintendent, director, and stockholder of the Desk and Furniture Company of Rockford, was born in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, in 1854. He was the eldest child of Gotlieb G. and Paulina (Falke) Bauch, natives of Germany. His parents reared eight children, five sons and three daughters. Gotlieb G. made his living in Wisconsin as a weaver and eventually became superintendent and manager for Niedner and Company. He received a soldier's Claim on Butternut Creek for service in the War Between the States and it was there that he died in March of 1889.

Miss Flora E. Springer, born in Maine, July 25, 1854, became the wife of Robert Bauch and the mother of his three children, Robert G., P. A., and a daughter Florence, who died young. Her parents were George W. and Rosanna (Gup-

till) Springer, who, like the Bauch family, were natives of Germany.

In 1958 the combination bookcase and writing desk, designed by Mr. Bauch, which put Rockford in its advantageous position as a furniture producing city, was challenged as to its claim as a Rockford innovation. Mrs. Gus Peterson, who lived at 508 Sixth Street at that time, displayed a piece of furniture with the date 1879 and its inscription, "To Our Pastor". It was presented to Mrs. Peterson's father, the late Rev. J. E. Erlander, who had served as pastor of Zion Lutheran Church in Rockford. It was the gift of the choir of Burlington, Iowa, where he was ordained a minister in 1878 and served his first pastorate in the Burlington Church. Mrs. Peterson believed the case was made in Burlington. The case is different in some respects from the Rockford-designed creation of Mr. Robert Bauch.

In 1929 the late A. D. Erlander credited the Central Furniture Company, organized in 1879, with creating the first combination bookcase and writing desk in Rockford. The contribution made by the designing and manufacture of the Rockford-made piece of furniture stands as a historical fact. Its worth to the city and the furniture industries is unmistakable.

Central Furniture Company was organized here in 1879 by forty-six Swedish immigrants who paid five hundred dollars per share to become stockholders. Only half of the sum was paid in cash. The company's officers in 1882, when this piece of furniture was introduced, were: S. A. Johnson, president; L. M. Noling, vice president; August P. Peterson, secretary; A. P. Floberg, treasurer; and A. G. Johnson and Andrew Norling, superintendents. When the Bauch-designed item was introduced, Rockford furniture had extended only to the Midwest. The combination case spread the fame of Rockford furniture nationally.

EARLY DAYS IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY

By Billie Whitsitt

(Continued from last issue)

Editor's note: We continue with Thomas Lake's quotation: "A great deal of sympathy was often exhibited for the poor, tired-out family. The next thing to know was how the exchequer stood. If that was found to be low, the teams, wagons, etc., were closely scrutinized. After a little friendly talk the traveler would enquire if they knew where he could make a claim. 'No, sire, it is all taken.' 'Why, I saw no house for miles on the road, in my journey over the prairies.' 'All taken, all taken! What kind of a claim do you wish?' On having this question answered, they would inform him that he could be accommodated possibly, if he would stop for a few days and rest, but they 'would be too busy until tomorrow.' Tomorrow, if they were not too lazy, someone would start off with an axe, prepared to mark off a claim for his new-found friend, extolling the country and telling how fast land is going up, till he has him well

soaped and greased, all ready to swallow, wagons and all."

John Thurston is the most important chronicler of the Rockford area for the 1830's. On February first, 1837, a sleigh, pulled by two Morgan horses, left a Troy, New York, hotel. In the sleigh were a thirteen-year-old boy, John, his father, Henry Thurston, and two other men. They urged the horses westward, later exchanging the sleigh for a wagon, and sometime in March arrived in Chicago and put up at a hotel. Mr. Haight and a Mr. Lee, another farmer from Rockford, also staying at the same hotel, persuaded the travelers to settle in Rockford. Mr. Thurston, knowledgeable in the ways of running a hotel, took over Rockford House. Fifty-three years later his son John wrote: "The immigration of this locality in the years 1837-38 was simply immense, a regular 'boom.' The roads were thronged with immigrants, many of them driving cattle, horses, and hogs, and as each had a little money, trade was excellent."

Church wrote this of John Thurston: "Mr. Thurston was uneducated in the learning of the schools; nevertheless he had a retentive memory, a ready wit, and a natural aptitude for writing that has made his little volume . . . quite popular with all classes of readers. He has graphically portrayed that circle of pioneer social life in which he moved."

(Concluded in next issue)



These lovely old trees and the historic Barnes home at the right will soon be lost to Rockford if the lovers of history and nature do not unite to save them.

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