

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

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## A SUCCESSFUL "FIRST"

By Hazel A. Kluck

Fellowship Hall of Centennial United Methodist Church was a colorful sight in red, white, and blue, as the crowd of 100 gathered for the Rockford Historical Society's first banquet on February 9, 1970. If you missed it, be assured you missed a fine evening--eats, program, and fellowship.

"Oh, a wonderful stream is the river of Time,  
As it runs through the realm of tears,  
With a faultless rhythm, and a musical rhyme,  
And a broader sweep, and a surge sublime,  
As it blends in the ocean of years."

Beginning with these lines by B. F. Taylor (Kett's HISTORY OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY) and continuing through alternating narration by Mrs. O. H. Riess and Mrs. Herman G. Nelson and music, the history of America, Illinois, Winnebago County, and Rockford was presented from the days before Columbus to the present. The Mendelssohn Club Women's Chorus, directed by Mrs. L. R. Hansen, presented choral numbers and solos and led the lusty community singing. From the first strains of an authentic recording of the Indian "Rabbit Dance", the music continued through the years with popular, religious, and folk tunes right down to today's modern religious folk song "Allelu," which the audience readily learned.

### "WHEN DID YOUR FAMILY COME TO WINNEBAGO COUNTY?"

This question was asked those who attended the banquet by past president Robert Borden, just before "Our History in Favorite Songs of Yesterday" was presented. All those whose families were in the county in 1880 were asked to stand. To our surprise, this was approximately one-third of the audience. Going backward by fives to 1855 diminished the number considerably, so the pace was slowed. After 1840 was called, only three members were left standing: Mrs. Clement Burns, Mrs. Chandler Miller, and Hazel Kluck. (Since you have read about my Patterson ancestors in a recent issue, I will concentrate on Barbara Gill Burns and Frances Frisbie Miller.

### DAVID SAM CAMPBELL

Mrs. Burns' great-grandfather, David Sam Campbell, was born in Vermont in 1815, and first came to Winnebago County in 1836. He filed a claim on 160 acres (northeast corner





of Trask Bridge and Sarver Roads one-half mile east of the Pecatonica Road) at the west edge of what was to become the village of Elton. This farm has been occupied by three generations of David Sam Campbell's family--at present, by a grandson, Carr Sarver.

David Sam Campbell returned to Vermont during the winter of 1839-40, was married, brought his bride, Erixna (Barker) to Illinois, and settled down to married life. They came with an ox team, a pig, and a crateful of chickens. The young Mrs. Campbell also brought peony roots and asparagus roots for her new home in the West. These were the beginnings of the present peony and asparagus beds on the Sarver farm, a tribute to the foresight and care of Mrs. Campbell, and subsequently her daughter, Lois Sarver, and granddaughter-in-law, Marie Sarver. Any of you familiar with this stretch of Trask Bridge Road will recall the long row of beautiful sugar maple trees along the north side of the road (east of the house). These trees also were brought from Vermont by the Campbells in 1840 as mere sprouts.

The David Sam Campbell's daughter, Adeline, became Mrs. D. J. Stewart. Their son, Arba Z., was Barbara Burns' grandfather, her mother having been Arba Campbell's daughter, Floss.

Can you imagine a buffalo being killed in front of the house there on what is now a busy highway? The Carr Sarvers have the hide of the buffalo that David Sam Campbell killed.

On a trip to Chicago with wheat, Erixna Campbell asked her husband to bring her a blanket chest or chest of drawers for storing her quilts. He brought back such a beautiful chest of drawers that his good wife thought it was too nice to place on the dirt floor of the log cabin--that's when the house was built. Barbara and Clem Burns' daughter now has this chest.

(Incidentally, the Pattersons and the Campbells lived only six or seven miles apart so were friends and neighbors.)

#### SHEPHERD LEACH

Mrs. Miller's great-grandfather, Shepherd Leach, was also a Vermonter and came to Winnebago County in 1838. He was a sheep farmer and school teacher and came West because of his health. He and Mr. Pierpont took up adjoining claims and shared a cabin which was built straddling the common property line. By doing this, when one was gone over night, the other slept crosswise of the line so that

his head was on one claim and his feet on the other. In this way they could hold both claims as it was necessary to sleep on your claim. Mr. Leach built the fine stone house and fence on the Pinehurst dairy farm on Montague Road and by 1877 owned 1,000 acres of land.

Shepherd Leach was so homesick when he first came here that he wrote home to his father, instructing him not to sell the house next door because he might come back to Vermont. However, he stuck it out. Mr. Leach entered business with Mr. Penfield in his store on East State Street, borrowing \$500 for the venture. He wrote home, wondering how he would ever repay the loan.

Willoughby Frisbie claimed Clara, the oldest daughter of the Shepherd Leaches, as his bride. Their son, Leigh Allen Frisbie, was the father of Frances Miller.

#### MOWRY BROWN

Another of our members who was busy in the kitchen would have been a fourth one whose ancestors were in the county prior to 1840. He is Millard Castle, a descendant of Mowry Brown, who came to this county in May, 1838, from Rhode Island.

#### HOW ABOUT YOU?

We hope these little snatches of early family history will interest some more of you in writing up your early family history, or at least furnishing the information for our archives. Do not feel that your ancestors in this area would have to date back to 1840 to be of interest. Mrs. Ruth Lunde (965-3662), chairman of our Early Family History Committee, would be glad to talk to you.

#### RALPH EMERSON, PIONEER CAPTAIN OF ROCKFORD INDUSTRY

By William J. Condon

(Concluded from last issue)

Thus, Emerson left Bloomington and rejoined his brother, Joseph, in Beloit, who helped Ralph obtain a clerk's job. He went to work for a combination grocery and hardware concern called Fisher, Keep & Co. for \$300 a year. This firm had a branch hardware store at Rockford kept by a man named Jesse Blinn, but the company was dissatisfied with the operation. Ralph was talked into joining Blinn and later to buy him out. He borrowed money from his father back East and so at 21 Ralph Emerson became a mercantilist. Although he had just recently attained his majority, many townspeople thought him to be older. This was an asset, however, and the public considered him a grown and mature businessman.

One of the concern's customers was a neophyte reaper manufacturer, John H. Manny. He was located northwest of Rockford at a village known as Waddams Grove. Manny was not a man of means and thus incurred debts through the purchase of items at the Emerson & Blinn store. The only method by which he could make payment was by selling a share of the business. In the spring of 1854, Emerson contacted his future father-in-law, Wait Talcott, and his

brother Sylvester, and both became associated with Manny as partners. That same fall Emerson & Blinn also entered into the firm with the new name, Manny & Co.

The first reaper that the new company manufactured was bought by an agent of McCormick of Chicago. Unfortunately for the fledgling organization, they did not know in whose behalf the agent was acting. A lawsuit quickly ensued, and thus did Lincoln become involved along with his future Secretary of War, Edwin Stanton, as lawyers for the defense. The case dragged on and before it was brought to the U. S. Supreme Court, Manny died. The lawsuit was finally won after 1000 pages of testimony and a total cost of \$60,000 out of which Lincoln received his largest fee heretofore, \$1,000. The McCormick interests had sued for alleged infringement of a certain reaper patent.

In 1857 Emerson and the other principals bought out Blinn for \$37,000 and the firm became Emerson & Co. In the fall of 1857, the company became heavily in debt and was being pressed by creditors. Emerson's strong character prevailed, however, and he sent his father-in-law to be, Wait Talcott, to New York to hold the Eastern creditors at bay. This scheme worked and the local creditors followed suit. In later years, Emerson claimed that it took ten years to get the firm on a sound financial basis. Meanwhile, Emerson had met Talcott's daughter, Adaline, during a brief stop at the Talcott home in Rockton on his way to his brother's residence at Beloit. He married the "Little Lady" as he called her on September 7, 1858. Prior to this, Emerson had lived on North Church Street in his cousin's home. This relative happened to be a minister who had



Ralph Emerson's Home on North Church Street as it appeared when purchased by Emerson

built the home at 427 North Church for his first wife. She died as it was being completed, and the year after Ralph was married the cousin left Rockford, and the home was purchased by Ralph. This area of North Church was known at that time as "Haskell's Orchard", and the park directly across from the Emerson site is still called Haskell Park. Through the years, Emerson added on to accommodate his growing family, and at his death in 1914 the home hardly resembled the parsonage of earlier years.



The second step in the expansion of the company occurred in 1876 when it became Emerson & Talcott, with Ralph as President, Daniel Goodlander as Secretary, and W. A. Talcott as Treasurer. This plant was located on the water power and South Main Street. In 1895 it was reorganized under the name of Emerson Manufacturing Co., and in 1909 the name Emerson-Brantingham came into being. At the time of Emerson's death, the latter firm was capitalized at \$22 million and the plant embraced 100 acres in Rockford's west end. The Emerson Carriage Co. was located at the water power site at this time. The Emerson-Brantingham firm employed about 5,000 people in all its departments. Emerson actually stepped down from many of his business responsibilities during the mid 1890s. He was deeply grieved by the loss of his only son, Ralph, Jr., who died fighting a fire on his father's property in 1889. The lad was only 23 at the time, and it is certain that the father was looking to the son to preside over the empire when the senior Emerson would retire.

Emerson was a very dedicated family man and was the father of eight children, two of whom died in infancy. Of the six who lived to adulthood, the only son died as stated above. The daughters were Adaline Thompson, Harriett Hinchliff, Mary Lathrop, Belle Keith, and Dora Wheeler. His dedication to the family is confirmed by the fact that the Hinchliff and Keith families lived directly behind the Emerson residence facing North Main Street. The Emerson home stood slightly north of where the Mendelssohn Club is now located, and the Keith home is now the Burpee-Wood Funeral Home. The Hinchliff home, formerly at 436 North Main Street, is still standing but has been moved to an adjacent site and slightly to the rear.

Mr. Emerson was a generous contributor to many charitable endeavors, one of which was the Emerson Institute of Mobile, Alabama, for the education of Negroes. He also gave large sums to Rockford Hospital. In later years, his daughters, Mrs. Lathrop and Mrs. Thompson, and a niece gave the old Emerson site for the Mendelssohn Club building project. The Woman's Club building was also built on what was at one time Emerson property. The death of Ralph Emerson

brought tributes from across the land. One came from the great Negro leader, Booker T. Washington, who said, "Our race has lost one of its greatest friends, a friend of Lincoln, a friend of the Negro race, everyone's friend." Thus on August 19, 1914, did Ralph Emerson expire, just several days after supervising the construction of his summer home at the confluence of the Rock and Kishwaukee Rivers. A 5-acre tract on this site was set aside by his daughter, Dora Wheeler, as a place for faculty and students of Rockford College to study the flora of the Rock River region. It is known as the Ralph Emerson Flower Reserve, and every May 3, his birthday, a picnic is held to honor one of the most prominent pioneers in Rockford's early history.

LOCATIONS WERE MANY---MUSIC WAS VITAL  
By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

Mendelssohn Club of Rockford has many faces, for its activities or sections are varied. Even the locations associated with this group shifted during the years. Rockford was only thirty-two years old as a chartered city when the group was organized. It was in the "parlor" of the home of Mrs. Chandler Starr in the fall of 1884 that twenty Rockford women gave the first Mendelssohn program.

The first program, Thursday, October 16, 1884, at the residence of Mrs. Starr:

German Rounds Nos. 1 and 3	Moszkowski
Mrs. Chandler Starr and Miss Laura Starr	
"Could'st Thou But Know"	Balfe
Miss Florence Thompson	
"When the Night in Dusky Shadows"	Franz Abt
Miss Alice Brown	
"Printemps D'Amour"	Moszkowski
Mrs. Chandler Starr	
"The Song of the Brook"	Nemo
Miss Lena Hayes	
"A Drooping Flower"	Spindler
"Dance on the Lawn"	Kullak
Miss Lucretia Starr	
"Flower Greeting"	Curschmann
Mrs. F. W. Smith, Mrs. Woodbury and Miss St. John	

Charter members of the Mendelssohn Club when organized, October 4, 1884: PIANISTS: Mesdames Frank Woodbury, Ella Jacoby Hall, Nettie Emerson, A. C. Deming, John Eustace, Theron Pierpont, Lucretia Starr, Arthur Frost, O. R. Brouse, Howard Hall, Kittie Foote, Chandler Starr, Minnie Fleming, George Briggs, Lyon Ross, Belle Clark, J. B. Antes, E. J. White, Peyton Harrison, J. L. Keep, George Holt, Lizzie Rice, E. P. Lathrop, and Miss Kittie Dickerman; SINGERS: Mesdames John L. Clark, Frank De Land, H. H. West, Judson West, Willis Kimball, Bert Farnham, Walter Edwards, D. H. Ferguson, Lizzie Briggs Ferguson, Clara Deitrich,

J. H. King, William B. Barbour, W. H. Loucks, Ada Ellis, Henry Allen, A. G. Spalding, William B. Emerson, and Misses Florence Thompson, Minnie Burpee, and Martha Kennedy. Note: While the number present in Mrs. Starr's home is given in Mendelssohn literature as twenty, the charter list contains more than twenty names. Felix Mendelssohn had been dead but thirty years. His name was chosen for the club.

The first public concert of the Mendelssohn Club was given on June 4, 1885, in a small hall for 250 invited guests.

The Rockford Mendelssohn Club gave a concert in 1893 at the World's Fair in Chicago. The Women's Musical Clubs in the United States had a reunion there lasting one week. It was several years later that the National Federation of Women's Musical Clubs was formed.

June 15, 1886, was the first artist program of the Mendelssohn Club. This was given by a Chicago trio composed of: Mrs. Emil Liebling, pianist; Mr. Becker, violinist; and Mr. Eicheim, cellist. The club paid \$62 as a fee to this trio.

Associate members early became an important asset to the cultural activities. Non-performing persons have fostered the music provided for the community.

In 1888 the Club began to hold its meetings in the Court Street Methodist Church. From there the club moved to the third floor of what was then known as the Wheelock Store on West State Street. In 1899 George Briggs built a hall on West State as a memorial to his wife, a former Mendelssohn Club president. He named the building Mendelssohn Hall and it served the club for ten years.

When the club was in the location on the north side of West State Street in the 500 block, interesting programs were given. "Manon" was given with Florence Carpenter, soprano; Floyd Tracy, tenor; and Hazel Hicks at the piano. It was a concert version with no costumes or scenery. Characters occupied chairs from which they simply rose, advanced to the center of the stage, and sang the different parts in the score.

Impressive religious and oratorio programs were given,



Mendelssohn Hall on West State Street

including the majestic "Parsifal" produced in Second Congregational Church. It was some years later when "The Messiah" became an annual event. "The Elijah" was given at Court Street Methodist Church. Singers of the calibre of Louis Sudler, Donald Gramm, Maud Nossler, and Lili Crookasian from Chicago sang the leads in these later presentations.

The first Women's Chorus of Mendelssohn Club was organized in 1899 under the direction of Mr. Ortengren of Chicago. In 1902 the celebrated Harrison Wild came out from Chicago and directed for several years. Mr. William H. Boyer was director in 1937. Mr. William Notley Hughes of Chicago followed Mr. Boyer. Accompanists have been possessed of high musical standards. Marion Sandeen (Mrs. Seigfred Sandeen) is representative of the loyalty and devotion of these fine musicians. Closely associated with Mendelssohn Ladies Chorus has been the Rockford Men Singers. The programs have ranged from classical through operetta music and some lighter numbers with a fun element.

One of the several places where Mendelssohn concerts were given was the Christian Union Church, since demolished, which stood on the northeast corner of North Church and Mulberry Streets. These quarters were used for three years.

At the time of the death of Mrs. Chandler Starr, Dr. Charles Parker Connolly, pastor emeritus of the Church of the Christian Union, said of her she "had an abiding faith in the capacity of ordinary people for extraordinary music. Her memory will remain Rockford's great musical benediction."

Opera was given in English. In one opera at the Grand Opera House, probably "Hansel and Gretel", one of the female characters appeared in tights. This occasioned considerable excitement. At the Old Grand Opera there was considerable glamour in front of the curtains. The dressing rooms were dingy and lacking in places to hang clothing and costumes.

When the club again needed new quarters, Mrs. Thomas Chick erected a building in the 200 block of North Main. This is the present site of the Armory. For thirteen years the Chick Building rendered excellent service to the Rockford Mendelssohn Club. It was here that Mrs. Starr and other members developed a very outstanding series of opera programs which were elaborately costumed.

Mrs. Starr put in long hours acquiring and mending costumes and properties. She insisted upon authenticity of appearance. She once covered a vehicle found in some barn with red paper to give the appearance of a four-wheeled phaeton.

(To be concluded in next issue)

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