

NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 7

November-December, 1970

Number 6

PIONEER LEATHER MERCHANT By C. Hamilton West

Lucius Morris West, who built the brick home at the north - east corner of Madison and Walnut Streets about 1870, was born at Vernon Ct., New York on June 19th 1820. After securing a liberal education, he engaged during his 18th year in a form of jobbing trade carried on in those days by team and wagon, in supplying merchants for their retail trade. This was at a time when other means of transportation to the interior depended upon the timber and strap iron rails of the New York Central Railroad, or on the Erie Canal.

On May 22nd 1842, he married Sarah Ann, daughter of Cephas and Elizabeth Sturtevant. The family lived for a while at Oneida, where the first born son Hamilton joined the family, and at Syracuse, where Elliott S. was born. Among the products which was in large demand by his retailers, were those of the Goodyear Rubber Co. located in Connecticut. Seeking work which would permit him more time with his family, he sought and received employment with this company and which resulted in moving to Naugatuck, Conn. His ability was recognized and during the succeeding 12 years, he rose to Superintendent of manufacturing of rubber clothing, rubber fabrics, vulcanizing, finishing and shipping departments. After a disastrous fire destroyed the plant, he moved his family to Illinois, where his wife's relative reported favorable opportunities. While at Naugatuck, a third son Lucius Judson was born.

After a short visit with his wife's relatives at Roscoe, the family moved to Rockford in 1858. Soon thereafter he opened a store on West State Street for the sale of leather and rubber goods. A severe case of asthma prevented him from responding to Lincoln's call for volunteers, but it provided him with large sales of merchandise to the soldiers at the army camp located in the north part of the city. After the war, he sought other means of providing for the needs of the community and after some experimenting he developed a superior product for preservation of leather, largely used for carriage tops, which was largely sold throughout the United States and to South America, and to a limited extent in Europe. This venture coupled with a harness soap, a lineament for sore muscles and an abrasive soap, proved to be very profitable. Mr. West decided to build a home commensurate with his business' success, and purchased a lot and built a brick home containing conveniences which were unusual for that period.

A wood burning furnace in the basement provided heat for the hot water radiators in each room in the house. Also in the basement, was a walk-in cold room which was chilled with several tons of ice from the nearby Rock River. In the attic was a water tank which was filled by a hand operated pump in the kitchen by the regularly employed handyman. This provided water under pressure for the kitchen, the radiators, and the bathroom. The latter had a flush toilet, a wash basin and a tin bathtub enclosed in wood. Water was also piped to marble top basins in several of the bedrooms. There were fire places in both the "parlor" and "sitting-



room". All windows were provided with upper and lower louvres and the floors and the stairs were carpeted. It was all respects a comfortable home where church groups, relatives and friends were welcome. Suffering from hayfever and asthma for years proved fatal to Mr. West and he passed away at his home on August 20th 1893. Sometime later, Mrs. West went to live with her son Hamilton and died there on Jan. 31st 1900.

TINKER SWISS COTTAGE
By Carol Nowicki
(Concluded from Last issue)

The dining room is another interesting room in Tinker Cottage. It has walls that are painted with murals of fruits, vegetables, animals, pictures of famous people of the past and many beautiful scenes. In this room there is the original glass and dinner-ware from Bohemia, France, Austria, China, Germany and England.

There are many other rooms, items and facts of interest about Tinker Cottage. Two more rooms out of all the other rooms in Tinker Cottage are the living room and the master bedroom. The living room represents the Victorian era in the midwest in the 1840's. In it there are two carved alabaster pedestals from Italy, a rocking chair which Lincoln once used, Victorian furniture which was handcarved and two rare early American primitives. The master bedroom is the most representative type of Swiss architecture in the house. This room has a beamed ceiling, a rosewood bedroom suite, some of Mrs. Tinker's dresses from the 1840's a Bible dated 1816, and a colorful commode set of English Spode. Some of the items and their history are of interest also. In the upper hallway there is a portrait of Mark Twain which he himself said was the best likeness to himself that he had ever seen. It is the same one that Mr. Tinker had locked in his safe when Samuel Clemens visited there because Mr. Clemens had previously threatened to take the picture because it was so good. There is a France Empire mirror of 1840 sparkling diamond dust, the dress



Mrs. Manny wore to Lincoln's Inaugural Ball, March 4, 1861, tables and pedestals made of pressed oak roots, and many other things. Some of the famous people known to visit the families of Tinker Cottage were Abraham Lincoln, Mark Twain (Samuel Clemens) John Manny, and the famous Ball family of which Mary Manny Tinkers' great grandmother, and Martha Washington were members.

BIBLIOGRAPHY
ON TINKER COTTAGE

Phamphlet from Tinker Cottage

Post Cards of the Rooms from Tinker Cottage
Living Room
Dining Room
Library
Master Bedroom

Rockford Public Library
Research folder on Tinker Cottage
Newspaper Clippings

THE WINNEBAGO CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

The locale for the story of this pioneer church was Westfield Corners in a school house, a site of a stone church in the heart of Winnebago Cemetery where the Civil War memorial has stood for many years, and the building more recently occupied by the Methodist Church of Winnebago. The beginnings are best traced by going back to the year 1845 and to the families that decided to leave Oneida County, New York to migrate to new homes in Illinois. One winter day in 1845 the men and women drove a distance of six miles to the home of Deacon Laney for a meeting of the Ladies

Civil War Memorial located where Old Stone Church formerly stood in the Winnebago Cemetery.



Sewing Society. Rev. James Hodges, pastor of the Talberg, Oneida County Church in New York came with his wife. Others present were the Luther Millers and Mr. and Mrs. Demus Grippen. The men enthusiastically planned their coming trip to Illinois, persuading the pastor to bring his wife and eight children along. These were the eight people who in July 1846 organized the church that came to be known as Winnebago Congregational Church. Rev. James Hodges, Hannah Hodges, Luther Miller, Candy Miller, Demus W. Grippen, Lydia Miller Grippen, Edwin Miller, and Alba Miller.

In September, Demus Grippen and Rev. James Hodges and their families with their household goods came from New London on the Erie Canal to Buffalo, New York, and from there by propeller around the lakes to Chicago, Illinois. Luther Miller met them with oxen and wagons and took the party and their belongings to their new homes in Winnebago County near Rockford, Illinois. The date was October 19, 1845, when they reached this destination. Luther Miller returned to New York in February for his family and came to the Westfield area with the George Osborn family in May of 1846. The trip often took three months from New York to Illinois.

Rev. James Hodges held meetings in a school house near the site of a church then called the Methodist Church of Elida. The families felt strongly they should organize their group formally into a church.

The Winnebago Congregational Church was organized in the month of July of 1846, with a membership of eight. Luther Miller was appointed Deacon in 1847 and served until November 1869. Hampton Sloan served from 1854 until his death which occurred March 30, 1876. The first trustees were Chaucey Ray, Demus Grippen and Elijah Holt. Spencer Welden was elected secretary and Luther Miller, treasurer for the society.

The story of the migration of these families and the early history of the now vanished church were preserved in some hand written letters from Mrs. Nancy Herring of Ransom, North Dakota, who was a daughter of Demus W. Grippen, and by Alba Miller and H. Frances Miller, his wife. Some of the letters bear dates in July

Methodist Church in Winnebago -- Building Purchased from the Congregational Church.



1896, when the church was celebrating its fiftieth anniversary. These letters tell of the sacrifice and effort that went into establishing a church and then building Old Stone Congregational Church.

Rev. Hodges was holding meetings in the School House at Westfield Corners. The Methodists had a class also and services were conducted mostly by students from Mt. Morris Seminary. Rev. Hodges and his group became deeply involved in discussions of the wrongs of slavery. Some people of the vicinity were apparently opposed to this strong stand. To avoid unpleasantness meetings were held in the homes of the members.

Some of the members, one of whom was Luther Miller, were actively engaged in the pre-Civil War "underground railroad". Some of the Stations were the old stone barn near Byron, Illinois Homer Smith's place south of Edwardsville; and the Coffin farm on Cunningham Road, according to a Centennial History of the town of Winnebago, published in 1954.

More families were coming into the neighborhood and some of these were joining the Winnebago Congregational Church. A few of the early members from the records follow:

Joined when	How	Members Names	Remarks
July 11, 1846	at Organization	James Hodges	Dismissed Oct 57
" "	" "	Luther Miller	Died Nov. 7, 1882
" "	" "	Edwin Miller	Dismissed
" "	" "	Alba Miller	" 1859
" "	" "	Demus W. Grippen	" Apr 59
Apr 1848	Professions of Faith	John Russel	Suspended
June 1849	" "	Anson S. Miller	"
Jan 1851	By letter	Elijah Holt	Died Mar. 20, 76
1852	" "	John Hughes	Dismissed July 59
1852	" "	G. A. Russel	"
1857	Profession of Faith	Seldon Champion	Died, Mar 9, 1873
1857	" "	Charles Evans	Susp. Oct 31, 51
1852	By letter	H. P. Sloan	Dism. Jan 17, 64

July 1854	By Letter	Mathew Evans	Dism. July 2,	5-
1854	" "	Israel Lindley	" May	1858
1854	" "	Alonzo Gorham	" April,	1868
Nov 1854	" "	Benjamin F. Long	Excom March	185-
Feb 1855	" "	Joseph Folsom	Died Nov. 3,	1875
Apr 11, 1856	" "	George D. Hicks	Dism. March	1869
Apr 11, 1856	" "	Newton Hicks	----	
May 1855	Profession of Faith	Rosnell Hawes	Dism.	1867
Nov 2 1855	By letter	Abraham Ostrum	" May	1865
May 2 1856	" "	Edwin Miller	----	
" " "	Profession of Faith	Morgan N. Cole	----	
" " "	" " "	Biskett G. Jennings	Dism.	1865
May 4 1856	" " "	Ezra Grippen	Dism. Oct.	1869

The question of building a place of worship arose. According to a paper written by Ida H. Miller and read Sunday August 9, 1914 it was first resolved to build a frame structure and the location selected was on the Westfield-Rockford Road near the home of Mr. Elijah Holt. However, settlements to the north on the prairies where Winnebago started had begun to build up and the Holt location, seemed off center for the congregation. A small supply of timber had been cut and hauled to that site when the location was reconsidered.

The building committee was composed of Elijah Holt, Thomas Hughes, H. P. Sloan, P. R. Levings, and A. Gorham. The site for Old Stone Church was in the present Winnebago Cemetery, at the place where a Civil War memorial statue has stood for many years. The place chosen was to serve as the church site and for the community burying ground.

P. R. Levings took the contract for the wood work and Thomas Hughes for the masonry. The work of quarrying the stone and most of the construction was done by volunteer labor. Spencer Weldon hauled the first load of stone. The quarry was in the woods back of Mr. Holt's place, but Alba Miller was uncertain whether the stone was furnished by Mr. Holt or Mr. Alonzo Hall. William Tate, a Scottish stone mason from Rockford laid the walls. Finer stones for windows and casings were prepared and shipped from quarries in Joliet. Hampton Stone and Alba Miller went to Rockford for two cut stones, which were placed for the sill of the front door and the cap over the door. Demus Grippen mortgaged his farm to pay for work and materials but the members worked hard to lift the debt and the church was debt free when dedicated.

After many difficulties the building was completed and dedicated in October of 1854 at a total cost of \$3,500. The land for the church and cemetery was donated by the Merryfield family.

The day of dedication was important in several ways. Rev. Samuel P. Sloan was ordained that day to the ministry and started his service there which was to last for about fifteen years. The young man must have been nervous indeed for it was also his wedding day. After the ordination, Miss Susan Margaret Grand Giraro and Rev. Samuel P. Sloan were united in marriage. Dr. Emerson of Second Congregational church of Rockford officiated at the dedication and performed the marriage ceremony.

The bell was installed two years after the dedication on November 25, 1856, during Rev. Sloan's pastorate, and was purchased, from the celebrated foundry of Meneely and Co. of Troy, New York. It weighed one thousand pounds and cost \$393.35, according to Ida

H. Miller. It was the first bell outside of Rockford for some time, states H. Frances Miller, and it was rung on many different occasions since there were no telephones. If anyone died in the neighborhood the bell was tolled to inform people of the age of the deceased. Alba Miller, who married H. Frances Miller, Jan 4 1857, remembered that the women of the church worked with energy to raise the money for the bell and that the men backed their efforts and helped to make the bell possible.

Some of the other ministers after Rev. Hodges and Rev. Sloan were: Rev. Henry M. Daniels (for sixteen years) Rev. Theodore F. Gardner, Rev. Sargeant, Rev. George Milton, Rev. Ross, and the last minister was Rev. Harry G. Mershon.

In 1892 the Old Stone Church had been condemned as unsafe and razed to the ground. Parts of the church and its furnishings were sold at auction. Some of the stones of the church were used to repair roads. Old pews could be found in homes for many years. Doors and windows found new uses. Two acres of land where it had stood were deeded by the First Congregational Church Society to the Winnebago Cemetery Association.

The cemetery remained and was always cared for. Here rest the fathers and mothers of Winnebago--the Briggses, the Burches, the Halls, the Hudsons, the Ostroms, the Hollenbecks, the Vanstons and the Levings.

Mr. J. W. Mitchell was responsible for leading a movement to set aside a place in Winnebago Cemetery for the burial of Civil War soldiers. The trustees of the association agreed to donate a lot for old soldiers. Mr. Mitchell chose the lot, 60 by 100 feet on which the Old Stone Church had stood. The town voted \$500 towards building a soldier's monument with the remainder of the money raised by subscription. Amos Hutchens built the 32 feet high monument at a cost of eight hundred dollars, with much of the labor donated.

In 1896 there was a fifty-year celebration held with a number of speeches and tributes to the founders of the church. Alba Miller was the only charter member then living. Rev. W. H. Ross was the pastor at that time. Attendance was good in the early days and at one time Winnebago Congregational Church had 293 members.

The Congregational Church in Winnebago was erected in 1883 while Rev. George Milton was pastor. The bell was transferred to the new building. On October 14, 1883 the first meeting was held. The church was closed on September 4, 1915, because of lack of membership. The last Sunday School superintendent was Marion Watson. In 1923 the building was sold to the Methodists whose church had been condemned as unsafe. The Congregational Missionary Society held monthly meetings until 1931.

OF DESIGN AND DESIGNERS OF FURNITURE

By Hazel M. Hyde

In America in the early 1700's, the home was likely to have a chest of drawers to replace the simple early box chest. Chairs began to replace stools. The early heavy turned and wainscot type was giving room to a simplified high back scrolled form of the



English Restoration style. In some homes the chaise lounge with an upholstered pad might be found. Small folding tables, a tired dresser and cabinets were found in prosperous homes.

The craft of the cabinet maker began to be separated from that of the joiner. There was an increasing attention to design and the use of veneers. Walnut was often used over a structure of pine. A reverse curve called the cabriole came into use.

Thomas Chippendale published in 1754, GENTLEMEN AND CABINET MAKERS DIRECTOR. The use of mahogany and rococo ornament was common in Philadelphia or Newport. Cabinet makers of Boston New York and the Connecticut Valley were making local versions of considerable originality which might have been termed "Colonial Chippendale". The English designers of the period tended to massiveness, while the colonial designers showed a preference for vertical and linear tension, achieving an elegance recognizable even in a modern time.

George Hepplewhite, of about 1788, and Thomas Shearton, of around 1791, must be mentioned. Then there were those other giants of furniture design: Samuel McIntire, James Seymour, and Duncan Phyfe. This brings the story of design to the Federal Period, doubtless influenced by the FRENCH DIRECTOIRE. There was a preference for light toned woods and a small scale rectangular design. Surfaces were generally unbroken but decorated with inlays of contrasting woods or low relief carvings.

About 1820, Victorian styles brought in heavy forms, coarser carved accents, and gilt or gilt bronze mountings. Proportion was often sacrificed to achieve an effect of richness and mass.

(Concluded in next issue)

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published bi-monthly by the Rockford Historical Society and sent to all members. Editorial address: 1325 Cosper Avenue, Rockford, Illinois 61107. Circulation address 2130 Clinton Street, Phone 965-3126. Membership: 1140 North Church Street, Phone 962-1303, or 420 Camlin Avenue, Phone 965-1138. President: Emma Charlotte Lundgren, 2703 Jackson Street, Phone 399-0124. Typing by Mrs. Sandy Hucker.