

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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SOUTH MAIN STREET'S OLD STONE HOUSE

Standing beside their beautiful fireplace are Mr. and Mrs. Leo Ginestra, owners of the historic stone house at 1115 South Main Street. Mr. and Mrs. Ginestra have lived in the home for

about forty four years and have no intentions of moving. "When I come in through the door, this house just throws its arms around me," is the way Mr. Ginestra described his feelings for the aged residence.

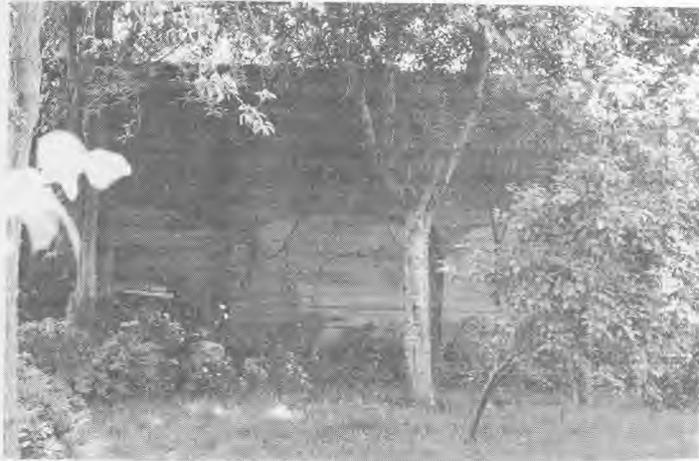
The home was built in 1857 by Freeman Graham, Sr. The Graham family was prominent in the industrial and commercial life of Rockford for many years. They were the proprietors of the Graham Distillery, Graham Cotton Mills, and Graham Match Company. The Grahams' daughter married Henry S. Warner, secretary-Treasurer of the Graham Match Company, and the Warners continued to live in the home until 1927, when it was sold to the Ginestras. An article extensively describing the house appeared in NUGGETS OF HISTORY, Volume 4, Number 1, (November-December, 1966) written by Shirley Boles and Belinda Wilson, who at that

time were students of Hazel Hyde at Washington Junior High School. In 1966 this historic residence was the victim of the spot
(Continued on page two)



Winding stairway in Ginestra home

zoning so prevalent in Rockford when a bottling business was given permission to build alongside the home to the front sidewalk, thereby obstructing the view of the house to people driving south



on South Main Street. However, Mr. Ginestra continues to keep the home in as historic a setting as possible under the circumstances. The old carriage house, stone wall, and tool house are still in



the yard at the rear as they have been throughout the years. Mr. Ginestra has shown a sense of history which is to be commended in a day and age when commercialism and the dollar seem to be uppermost in the minds of many.

SOCIETY MEMBER PUBLISHES BOOK IN INDIANA

Harold L. O'Donnell, charter member of the Rockford Historical Society, is shown below holding a copy of his most recent publication while on a trip to Rockford last October. Mr. O'Donnell's wife, the former Helen Trahern, is a Rockford native whose family was associated with early Rockford industry. Mrs. O'Donnell's



home was the large brick mansion still standing on the north east corner of Whitman and North Church Streets.

Harold O'Donnell's book NEWPORT AND VERMILLION TOWNSHIP THE FIRST 100 YEARS, 1824-1924, was published in 1969. It consists of thirty-nine chapters, to which are added a "Family and Biographical Section" of 66 pages, a "Map Section" of 13 pages, a 38-page section giving the census listings for the years 1840 through 1880, and a list of all Vermillion County legislators from 1853 through 1967. The entire volume contains 323 pages and about 135 halftones, as well as many line

drawings; there are also several maps in addition to those in the map section.

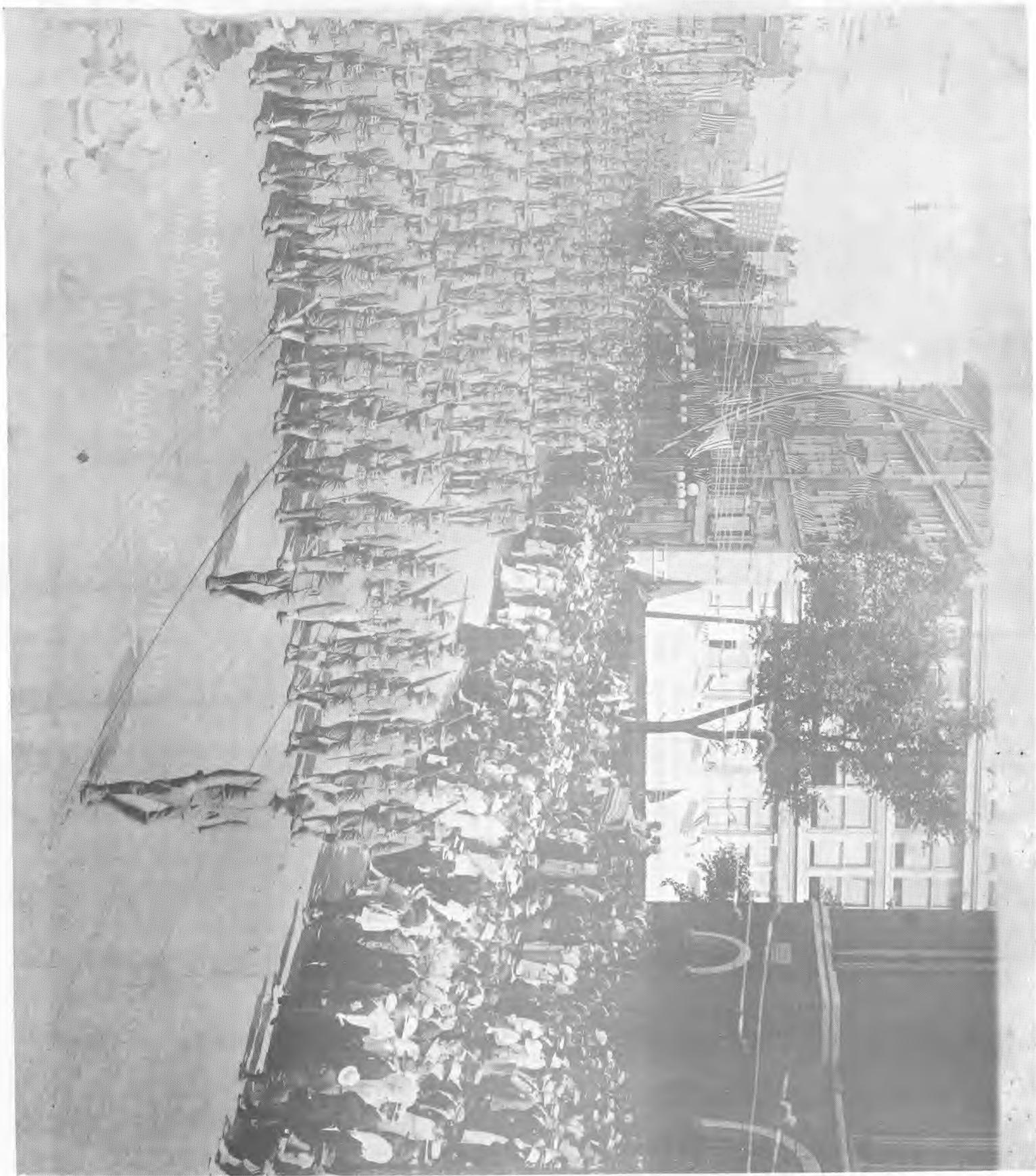
Mr. O'Donnell had previously written EUGENE TOWNSHIP (VERMILLION COUNTY, INDIANA): THE FIRST 100 YEARS, 1824-1924, which he published in 1964. Both books were reviewed in INDIANA MAGAZINE OF HISTORY.

WORLD WAR I PARADE

In August, 1970, Mr. Bill Cooley of Manchester, Tennessee, wrote to Mayor Schleicher about a picture he had found while antique hunting through some old houses in Coffee County. It was the photo shown on pages 4 and 5. The Mayor sent the letter to your Editor, who in turn wrote to Mr. Cooley, requesting a copy of the picture if possible. Mr. Colley answered by sending the original, with only the request that we send him a copy of NUGGETS OF HISTORY when we print it.

As can be seen, the camera was aiming westward on East State Street from a point just a few yards east of the intersection of Third Street. The State Street Baptist Church, which has been gone (relocated) for several years, is partially shown at the right. Other than that, East State Street has not changed a great deal. However, note the old street lamps along the sidewalk in front of the former Hess Bros. Building.

The soldiers on parade are the 86th Div. Troops led by Major-General Martin, Co. f, 341st Infantry. The date was July 4, 1918.



March of the Old City Guard
at the University of the Philippines

EARLY SETTLERS FURNITURE

By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

Old American wills and inventories mention furniture and other furnishings of the homes in very great detail. Some pieces of furniture have survived from the earliest times of our country. The colonial settlers in Massachusetts brought few comforts across the Atlantic.

By the second generation, about 1650, our forefathers had created a considerable amount of equipment. Cabins might be one, two, or three rooms, possibly with a loft above where the children would sleep. The furnishings consisted of chests, tables, cupboards, benches, chairs, stools, and simple bedframes. Often the beds were built against the walls. Benches might be stationary, near the fireplace. The parts were heavy and squared, often made of oak. Some of the plane surfaces had scratch or two-plane carving. Most of the furniture was made by members of the family.

The 1690's were marked by more variety in the woods used. Pine, maple and other woods were used separately or in combinations. Surfaces were now painted with coats of black, earth reds, and yellows corresponding to the dyes used for homespun wool and linens.

There were few differences in furnishings in the English settlements from 1650 to 1700. Dutch and Scandinavian variations came with the Dutch and Swedish settlements on the Hudson and Delaware Rivers. Transportation was slow and difficult so furniture styles were localized, especially in the back country. Some remembrance of European furniture may have influenced the early settlers. However, the shapes and sizes were adapted to the skill of the maker, his hand tools, and the wood available in his vicinity. The early inhabitants of this land came to have an individuality which showed up in their furniture and was shaped in part by their environment.

In 1647 one Christopher Youngs left a will naming among many other items: One Loomer with gears belonging to it, One bedstead & cord, Two chayres, a settle, One old Rugg and two old chests, A table and Minginge trough, A looking glass, An old straw bed, and cradle rug. Since spoons, saucers, Bibles, and pillows were each listed, it would appear that the foregoing were the articles of furniture owned.

By 1700 American colonists had become more furniture conscious. The effects of French and Dutch fashions and late Stuart English furniture were to be found. The box chest was replaced by a chest of drawers. The drawers were sometimes placed on a stand with turned legs. Chairs replaced stools and were often simplified versions of the English Restoration style. The chaise lounge with an upholstered pad and a tiered dresser might be found in the homes of the more prosperous, particularly in Tidewater Virginia. Cabinets of various sorts appeared. Paint, Veneer, and inlays of contrasting woods replaced the carved surface decoration.

The reverse curve became a favored form for the legs of chairs, tables and stands about 1825. This was a principal feature of the so-called Queen Anne Style. This feature dominated colonial furniture designs until the Revolutionary War.

ROCKFORD FURNITURE HERALD at the Rockford Public Library is interesting reading for persons interested in furniture. There are also small books with pictures of the different designs of

furniture in different periods of time as well as those that were designed in Rockford.

THE THATCHER BLAKE TABLE

Hazel M. Hyde

An aura of history surrounds a table now displayed at the north end of the local history and genealogy room of the Rockford Public library. It is a rare privilege to be allowed to touch the first table brought into Winnebago County. Carefully opening the drawer, the visitor may see the letters that tell of the trip by boat on Rock River and how Thatcher Blake brought this piece of furniture to Rockford. The table formerly had drop leaves, but these have been removed. The cherry wood is still lovely and has been refinished to preserve the surface.

In retrospect, we see the course of events was changed by the decision of Thatcher Blake and Germanicus Kent to leave the lead mines at Galena. Evidently the first adventure into the area of the rocky ford of the Rock River was made by these men by boat. They evidently built their craft at Hamilton's Diggings in order to follow the Pecatonica and Rock Rivers until they found the perfect site on the west side of Rock River. The creek that was later called Kent Creek fitted their demands for a sawmill and a site for a settlement.

Thatcher Blake, a school teacher and farmer twentyfive years of age, was very interested in farming. His claim was located one and a half miles west of the river, from a point west of present Avon Street to beyond Independence Avenue.

After filing their respective claims with the land office at Dixon, the men returned to Galena for tools and materials to build the sawmill. Several additional workers, including Lewis Lemon Kent, returned overland. These men had chosen a site for a town and to Kent and Blake go the honors for founding Rockford.

Thatcher Blake had more than average skill with tools. The log cabin he built was snug and comfortable. However he boarded with the Kent family. Germanicus Kent recorded in his diary that he hired Thatcher Blake for eighteen dollars a month and that Blake agreed to stay for twelve months or twenty-four months.

Blake lived until October 8, 1880, and built up considerable wealth in land. His home in Rockford was considered one of the fine homes of the day. He acquired paintings, which have been preserved. The drop-leaf table which has been acquired by the Rockford Library passed into the hands of Levi Moulthrop.

To quote the correspondence concerning the Thatcher Blake Table: Letterhead: Miners and Merchants' Bank, J. G. Reitsch, President; H. S. Hopka, Vice President; O. J. Duncan, Cashier; R. S. Sproul, Assistant Cashier. Roundup, Montana, September 24, 1931.

Rockford Public Library, Museum Department,
Rockford, Illinois
Gentlemen:

The writer is owner of a cherry-wood table that was the first table brought into Winnebago County. This was brought up Rock River in a row boat by Thatcher Blake, who lived on the west side of the River just below what is now Nelson Bridge. Subsequently it came into the family of Levi Moulthrop, whose mother was one of

the earliest settlers of your county, and I acquired it from Mr. Moulthrop many years ago.

I do not know if the Museum would be interested in having the old table, but if you care for it, I will be glad to donate it to you. It is in a good state of preservation, although it needs gluing together again, but the parts are all intact. If you so desire, I will ship it to you, if you will so state.

Respectfully,
(Signature) J. G. Reitsch
President

Bottom of page: Affiliated with Northwest Bancorporation. Combined resources \$483,000,000.

The reply to this letter follows:
Sept. 30, 1931

J. G. Reitsch
Miners & Merchants Bank
Roundup, Mont.
Dear Sir:

In reply to your letter of Sept. 24. We will be very glad to receive the cherrywood table that was the first table brought into Winnebago County.

We thank you for the courtesy.

Very truly yours,
(Signature not on carbon Copy) Librarian

Then the third letter concerning the table read:

Rockford Public Library
Rockford, Illinois
Gentlemen:

We are today shipping you by Express prepaid, the table that was brought up Rock River in a row-boat by Thatcher Blake; being the first table in northern Illinois. The top has come loose but we have crated it securely, and we wish that you would have some carpenter or joiner put it together properly, and send the bill to me.

The original top was eaten away by dry rot, and the then leaves (it was a square drop-leaf table) were made into a new top very well done, and it came apart again, but the material in it is all of the original table. One leg is also affected by dry-rot, but think this can be remedied somewhat.

Trusting that this shipment will arrive in good condition we beg to remain,

Sincerely,
(Signature) J. G. Reitsch
President

(Continued in next issue)

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