

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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EARLY WINNEBAGO COUNTY RESIDENTS

By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

The migration trails and the movement of people in the 1840's and 1850's is a subject of vast interest and present-day research. We tend to think of Illinois as the end of the trail. However, for some families it was a stopping point for a few years. Then the westward trek was resumed.

Elijah Huron Brown and Rebecca Marie Brayton Brown were a Rockford couple who went to California in 1849. Mrs. Mary P. Bonnie, 103 Catron, Apt. 21, Santa Fe, New Mexico, 87501, who is searching for information on this couple, states, "They typify the restless movement of the time. He was born in New York state, they were married in Ohio. Seven children were born in Ohio, two in Indiana, and the last three in Winnebago county, Illinois. The Rockford place was sold sometime after 1853, when Rebecca and the two younger boys joined Elijah Sr., in California."

Elijah H. Brown was a justice of the peace in Roscoe Township in 1841. He was listed for this one year only. Mrs. Bonnie found at least one marriage that he performed in that year: Washington Crosby and Alvira Nelson, daughter of William Crosby, married September 23, 1841.



Left: Elijah Huron Brown
Right: Rebecca Marie Brayton Brown

ROCKFORD'S EARLY COOPERAGE
By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

In 1865 Oliver A. Crandall came to Rockford and set up a cooperage shop. It was located on the water power and was very successful for several years. Oliver Crandall had learned the cooper's trade in the Empire State. He had plied his trade in Beloit, Wisconsin, from 1845 to 1865. He engaged in all types of cooperage.

About twenty years ago, we visited a cooper's shop. It may have been at Greenfield Village with its approximately fourteen craft shops, or Williamsburg with the many craftsmen ranging from blacksmith to wig maker, or some other pioneer village. Hand craftsmen can be fascinating to watch.

The barrels were the chief items made. You will recall that the sides of a wooden barrel were made of strips of wood called staves. These were bound together with wooden or metal hoops. The bulge in the middle resulted from the fact that staves were wider in the middle than at the ends. It was believed that this shape increased the strength of the container. The circular top and bottom were called heads and fitted into grooves near the ends of the staves. If the barrel were made for liquids, it was constructed with a hole called a bung in one end or on the side. The plug used to fill the hole was called a bung also. These barrels were made by hand labor. Skilled workers, who had learned the trade, were called coopers. The product was called cooperage. Also the place for working was known as a cooperage.

Other items which were made of wood were known as vats, casks, and hogsheads. The worker needed both patience and ability with a considerable degree of physical strength. Most coopers were proud of their skills.

The barrel was used as a unit of measure and in pioneer tales, there are comments like: the supplies consisted of ten barrels of flour. The barrel could have different sizes, however. In 1912 a law provided a standard measure for an apple barrel. Since that time an apple barrel has been precisely defined as having 21 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch staves and 17 $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch heads and the staves of a material not more than $\frac{4}{10}$ of an inch thick, with a capacity of 7,056 cubic inches. Such precision was not required of Mr. Crandall's product, but it was judged on whether a barrel for liquids would hold the whiskey or cider. A barrel for carrying seed corn was expected to be about the correct size to hold five bushels of corn. A hogshead was used as a unit of measure and in London a hogshead held 100 gallons of molasses. A somewhat small container was called a cask and there has been mention of casks of water or wine on primitive sailing vessels.

To explore the uses of barrels, there are several examples. The missionary barrel was very real some years ago. A group of earnest women banded together in some such organization as a Ladies Aid Society or the Missionary Society of a church packed the barrel. Some strange and unsuitable items found their way into the barrels along with warm, sturdy clothing. But usually the big wooden barrel was filled with useful articles, often fitted to a request list. The

custom has not been completely dropped, as Rockford Chapter DAR recently sent over 150 pounds of clean used clothing to St. Mary's School for American Indians. The barrel is no longer as suitable for shipping these items, because of its weight and shape.

In our general merchandise and grocery store there were wooden barrels for several commodities. The molasses barrel sat in the back room on its side with a spigot. This was a pin or peg that worked like a faucet. Molasses might flow more slowly on a January morning before the fire had been replenished with chunks of wood or coal after being banked with ashes overnight.

Cider or even vinegar came in bulk and there was a barrel of dill pickles in brine prior to World War I. Doubtless the cooper made cask and barrels for such foods. There were barrelsful of flour and casks of nails. He may even have made such wooden wheels as those that held 50 or 60 pounds of sharp New York Cheese. Wooden tubs of homemade butter were shipped from our store to a larger town.

O. A. Crandall, the cooper, was born December 31, 1827, at Penfield, Monroe County, New York. He died in Rockford October 10, 1889. His parents were Jairus and Sarah Crandall. They provided him with a common-school education and encouraged him to learn the cooper's trade. After plying his trade successfully, he became a salesman for Rockford Knitting Works. He had some musical talent and belonged to several local glee clubs. We can imagine that he may have sung lustily as he fashioned barrels, vats, kegs, and casks.

Mrs. Crandall was the former Miss Sarah F. Carpenter born June 27, Hoosick, Rensselaer County, New York. Her parents were George and Phebe (Crandall) Carpenter of New York. George Carpenter died in Rockford in 1872. Mrs. Phebe Carpenter lived to be a hundred years old, being, on November 16, 1904, Rockford's oldest lady. Sarah and Oliver Crandall were married in Beloit, Wisconsin, 1847, while he was engaged at his trade of cooper in Beloit, before moving to Rockford.

WHO MADE THE RAZOR?
By Hazel M. Hyde

The razor as an instrument for shaving has been in use for many years. The early razor, remembered by the oldest among our members, was made of steel which had a wedge shaped section, with straight sides tapering to a sharp edge.

Early in the nineteenth century the makers of the so-called "straight edge" razors began hollowing out the sides. This improved the fineness of the cutting edge. "As sharp as a razor" was a common expression of that early day. At the same time hollowing out the sides made the sharpening of the razor much easier. Hollow-grinding increased the lightness and flexibility of the blade. Finally the makers achieved what was known as the full hollow blade. While the razor was a dangerous instrument, one or more were found in most

homes.

Gentlemen often owned several fine straight edge razors, often one for each day of the week. About 1915, my father owned several fine straight edge razors. While there was a barber shop in our small town, Father, Wilson Shannon Mortimer, sometimes shaved a relative or friend as a special favor. He had a mug and brush for making lather. He had a small special "hone" but preferred a razor strap of leather.

Father's best razor strap was double and about eighteen inches in length. He had a very rhythmic way of "strapping: the razor. Incidentally, that razor strap filled a small child with respect. On occasions Father used the razor strap as an aid in teaching correct behavior or good manners.

A small shaving stand or commode held the large, hand-decorated with coin gold, bowl for water. Above this hung a mirror for use in shaving. A small drawer held extra supplies of shaving soap. At the end was a rack for the towel.

Razors were made in Rockford, Illinois, at a very early date. Strange requests come to our Rockford Public Library local history room. One of our present Rockford residents owns a straight edge razor with the words "Clay Cutlery Company, Rockford, Illinois" on it. The old city directories list a National Clay Company. What products did they make? The information that is sought is the date at which this razor must have been made in Rockford, Illinois. Possibly this razor may be an antique. Can anyone supply information about the Clay Cutlery Company?

THE CHARIVARI

By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

When there were loud banging, thumping, screeching, clattering noises, the older folks would shake their heads saying, "It sounds like a shivaree." They would recall the sounds of guns booming, pans being beaten, a bedlam of voices.

The charivari, also known as a shivaree, was a noisy mock serenade to a newly married couple in an early day. The custom was borrowed from early French settlers of Illinois, especially around KasKaskia. Mostly the young men of the community organized the charivari, called colloquially a shivaree. It was a mark of friendly notice of the newly-wedded persons new estate to shivaree them on their return from their wedding journey. Scarcely had the horse been unhitched, watered, fed and rubbed down, and led to her stall, than people began to gather from over the village or countryside.

It was a mark of manhood and courage for the young groom to come down and submit to his friend's often ill-advised witticisms. Some young brides shivered for the bodily safety of the new husband. When carried farther west to the Kansas prairies, the couple was expected to invite the entire group into the house and provide some refreshments. After the initial noise-making, the women and children came trooping along

to join the fun makers, laden with gifts for the newly married couple. An old acquaintance, long ago deceased, made his traditional gift what he termed "a thunder mug", or in more polite language a useful item of the day known as a chamber pot. Brooms were often part of the gifts for the household.

John H. Thurston in his "Early Days in Rockford" quoted from his ever-useful scrapbook that "Isaiah Lyon and Mary Hitchcock were married March 31, 1841". We are indebted further to his "Reminiscences--Sporting and otherwise" published in 1891 by the Press of the Daily Republican, for an account of the Charivari, to use the French spelling as Thurston did.

Mary Hitchcock, the bride, was described as a popular young lady. However, the young husband, Isaiah Lyon and Jonathan Hitchcock, her father, were considered good subjects for some good natured sport and there was a chance to remind them they hadn't treated the boys or "come down", as it was called in pioneer days. The Lyons were members of the Baptist Church and the father was sometimes called "Old Funds" by acquaintances. One of the participants, known to us only as a Baptist church member, helped Thurston recall the event. This Baptist brother had a score to even with Lyon, who had played several tricks on him during the previous summer.

Jonathan Hitchcock had built a new house at 107 North First Street, later occupied by Doctor E. J. Johnson. It was here that Isaiah Lyon was bringing his new wife to establish their first home. They went away on a wedding trip without any thought of a pioneer serenade.

Charles Oliver worked on the west side of Rock River to get participants. Mel Turner took the job of notifying people when the wedding trip would be over, so the time of the affair would be on the night of their return. The Baptist Brother was to prepare fire-balls and bonfires.

The weather was perfect when all gathered for the "concert". One man had a large dry goods box and a piece of wooden scantling well resined which he drew rapidly across the edges of the box to make an unearthly screech. The Baptist Brother, disguised with a Buffalo robe fastened around his waist and carrying a huge rattle called a horse fiddle, was the leader of the procession. Horns, pans, cow-bells, drums, guns and other noise makers suddenly broke the silence.

Apparently no rough horse-play accompanied the pandemonium. The family stood at the windows and appeared to enjoy the brightly lighted scene. When the players on wind instruments had become exhausted, Nicholas "Nick" Smith, a carpenter on the west side, who had come from New Jersey, led them away. They returned with what he called a "Swinette". Each man carried a large shoat under his arm. By grasping the muzzle of the animal, he produced high or low sounds by opening or shutting its mouth. With pigs squealing loudly, the most noted charivari party in northern Illinois came to an end.

Any memory may carry some of the older readers back to childhood. Along in the evening, when younger children were

saying their, "Now I Lay Me Down to Sleep" beside their beds a rumble of noise, gun shots, the sound of a beaten pan would come through the open window. To the child's "What's that?" the mother would soothe gently, "Just go to sleep, there was a wedding a few days ago the boys are welcoming them back with a Shivaree. No one is going to get hurt. It's all in fun."

FIRST ROPE MADE IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY
HEMP WAS GROWN AND THE ROPE MADE FOR FIRST FERRY
MORE DEMANDS FOR ROPE
By Hazel M. Hyde

John Bull, Winnebago County's early rope maker, was born in London, England, March 1, 1795. He came to America at the age of 29 and landed in New York July 10, 1824. Mr. Bull's first wife died in London ten months after her marriage. Janet Young, the second wife, was a woman of Scotch birth. John Bull went into business, became married, and declared his intention of becoming a citizen in the first year he was in this country.

The financial panic of 1837 caused Mr. Bull to lose \$6,000 in New York City. He sold out his property and started west in 1838. At Buffalo, New York, he fell in with Dr. C. H. Richings, Mr. Van Etten, Lawyer Martin P. Sweet, and two other men bound for Rockford, Illinois. Mr. Bull and his family joined this party of sixteen persons.

With two yoke of oxen, a wagon, and some provisions, Mr. Bull reached the east bank of Rock River, July 16, 1838. The Bull family spent the night at Rockford House, then run by Mr. Thurston. On the morning of the 17th of July he secured a guide and forded the river. He had been warned that if he strayed ten feet from the ford in the river, the wagon might overturn. He recalled later that he did not see a single person on the West Side of Rock River.

Continuing on he came to the vicinity of Hance's Settlement, in the area now known as Pecatonica. Near Mr. Van Etten's claim, John Bull bought 360 acres of land for \$300 from Archibald Hance. Here Mr. Bull began practicing three different trades. Two of these were harness making and rope making.

Germanicus Kent, then considering the need for a ferry across Rock River came to Mr. Bull to inquire about the making of a rope. He needed a rope cable long enough to cross Rock River and strong enough for a ferry.

Mayor Wheeler grew the hemp for the rope that John Bull agreed to make for Germanicus Kent. It is believed to have been the first rope made west of Chicago and certainly the first rope made in Winnebago County.

Hemp is an annual plant, one kind being grown for its fiber. The fiber hemp can be sown simply by scattering the seed on the ground. The single slender stems grow from four to twelve feet high. The fiber hemp is harvested when the flowers have fully blossomed. Hemp grows best in a moist,

mild climate and does especially well in the loamy soil of the Kentucky bluegrass region. Apparently in certain years hemp grew well in the Rockford area for Mr. Wheeler raised the hemp from which John Bull made rope.

After the long stalks are gathered, the hemp fibers must be removed. These fibers consist of many strings of long cells that lie in the inner bark along the stem. They must be separated from the bark and woody stem.

The hemp fibers are now given a process called retting or rotting. They are either soaked in soft water or hung out in the open and exposed to the dew. As the matter around the fiber softens, it can be removed easily. American hemp growers usually used the dew retting.

After the fibers became soft, they were beaten with a heavy club. Then the fiber was cleaned and tied in bales. It was ready then for use in making rope, cordage, twines, carpet thread or sail cloth.

John Bull used hemp for rope making. Other materials he might have used were manila, sisal, henequen or jute. In making rope, first the fibers were prepared by separating them. They were then laid straight and combed into ribbons. These ribbons were combed repeatedly and finally spun into yarn. The yarns were taken and twisted into strands. Next several strands, usually three, were twisted together to form the rope. Mr. Bull had learned the trade well and produced a very good quality of rope.

(concluded in next issue)

EVERY MAN HAS A STORY
By Hazel M. Hyde
(Concluded from last issue)

Rockford Industrial Athletic Association (RIAA) Yearbook for 1961 had this to say: "Al Goranson, our present chairman, has been a consistent leader in the work of the association for some years. Previous to his two terms as President, he served as our Treasurer. Very reluctantly he accepted the higher office when elected to that position. Al is the Superintendent of the Clutch Division of the Rockford Drilling Machine Company, a very busy man indeed. His love for sports is overwhelming and he has given generously of his few hours of spare time to conduct the affairs of R.I.A.A. Congenial, fair minded, with the profile and bearing of the great Knute Rockne, whom he resembles so markedly, we can only say we have been fortunate to have him serve the past two terms so unselfishly under prevailing conditions." The plaque was given by the RIAA and the flowers were from the Womens group.

"Tell something about the women's entry into the R.I.A.A. and your part in it," I suggested.

"The Men's Industrial Athletic Association is composed

Al Goranson is always ready to help a neighbor



of one man from each factory on a board of directors. While I was president Miss Doris Mortenson and I discussed ladies' bowling. I brought it up at the board meeting and they disapproved, thinking we should not have women in the association. So the following month, Miss Mortenson agreed to call various factories and inquire about girls bowling. The result was four factories had teams that wanted to bowl in a bowling league. At the next meeting I brought up the same subject again to the Board of managers and informed them these girls were anxious to bowl and that Doris Mortenson and I would organize a bowling league for girls, if the board again refused. After some discussion the Board of Managers agreed that they would support a Girls Bowling League, under the R.I.A.A. So the girls started bowling with four teams. Now there are 22 or 23 teams. Doris Mortenson Rathke became secretary of the National Bowling Association. She is listed in the Hall of Fame."

And this is the story of an 80 year old man whose lawn is always neat. His tools are always in excellent order. And, he always has a project that keeps him busy. He is interested in his neighbors and willing to do a favor. He will talk about his grandchildren or listen to your tales about trips and activities. Albert and Esther Goranson have been married 57 years, have two daughters, Mrs. Arthur Larson (Evelyn) of Canoga Park, about forty miles from Los Angeles, California, and Mrs. Harry Lindberg (Helen) of Rockford, and six grandchildren, and eleven great-grandchildren. Esther cooks the kind of food Al likes. They are both fond of their calico cat called Patches. In fact they are always friendly and interested in whatever may be happening. They are a Remarkable couple!

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