

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

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## ASH JOHNSON'S BOOK TO BE PRINTED IN "NUGGETS"

It is six years since W. Ashton Johnson departed this world to be with his Maker. During that time we have endeavored to carry on his work with NUGGETS OF HISTORY, which he founded in 1963.

Before his passing, Ash compiled a very comprehensive history of Rockford, which he had hoped to publish. Mrs. Johnson has kindly given her consent to have it printed as a serial in NUGGETS OF HISTORY, and the first installment begins with this issue. It will not necessarily be printed by chapters, as they vary in length, but it will be set down just as Ash wrote it, including his sequence and his interesting style. It may take years before we have printed it all, but we are certain that our readers will look forward to each installment.

## BEFORE THERE WAS A ROCKFORD

By W. Ashton Johnson

Rockford, Winnebago County, and the present state of Illinois were once part of the great Northwest Territory, explored and claimed as a part of the Old Dominion State of Virginia.

If the indomitable spirit of Col. George Rogers Clark and his Virginia militia had failed to capture British outposts in the wilderness (1777-78), the western boundary line of the newly born United States would have been the Ohio River.

By an act of Congress in 1800, this vast public domain was divided into Indiana Territory, embodying the present states of Indiana, Illinois, Wisconsin, and Michigan.

Indians of several nations roamed the North American continent for many centuries before the advent of the white man. The first of these to set foot on United States soil was Father Jean Nicolet, a Jesuit missionary from Quebec. Nicolet beached his canoe on the southeastern shores of Lake Superior in 1634. Thirty-two years later, 1666, Fr. Allouez became the first white man to explore Ous-con-sin (Indian spelling). Introducing the Christian religion to the Red Man gave the Jesuit father ample opportunity to launch his mission near Green Bay.

Explorers Louis Joliet, a native of Quebec, and Fr. Jacques Marquette were the first Frenchmen to travel south into Illinois. It is probable that the nearest the French exploration ever came to Rockford and Winnebago County was Starved Rock State Park and territory adjacent to Joliet.

Territorial Gov. William Henry Harrison, a Revolutionary War hero, enacted a treaty with the Fox and Sac Indian nations in 1804, whereby the latter tribes were given rights to remain in their settlements east of the Mississippi, in Illinois and Wisconsin, until such a time as those lands

were needed for settlement by the white men.

During the 1812 war with Great Britain to establish our rights on the high seas, a large band of Sac Indians under chief Black Hawk took sides with the British. Another group from the same nation remained neutral. Following the cessation of hostilities with the British, the latter tribesmen reaffirmed their promise to abide by the 1804 treaty. Black Hawk, however, and perhaps 1500 followers, claimed that the St. Louis treaty had been effected after the U.S. negotiators and the military had caused the Indian leaders to become intoxicated with "fire water."

Despite Black Hawk's indignation and veiled threats, the Sac and Fox nations remained at peace with the white men until 1830. That winter, the brooding chieftain and 900 of his braves crossed the Mississippi near Rock Island in quest of game and furs. When the Indians returned in April of 1831, they found their settlement on the east bank occupied by white settlers. Black Hawk ordered the newly arrived settlers away and then fired the log dwellings. This act was perpetrated despite government agents explaining that the village had been platted and parceled out to these new immigrants from the east. When eight of the homeless families petitioned Gov. Reynolds of Illinois for recourse, U.S. troops under a Gen. Gaines marched on the Indians. The Sac chief signed another peace treaty on June 30, 1831 without bloodshed resulting, but Black Hawk was still intent to eventually fight back at the "unfaithful" government.

Early in April of 1832 he broke his word by leading his warriors to the Wisconsin shores under pretense of visiting friendly Winnebago tribesmen. Persuading many of the Wisconsin Indians to follow his suggestion of waging battle, the large party paddled down Rock River to Dixon. When word of the invasion reached Gov. Reynolds at Kaskaskia, the governor called for volunteers. The 1800 men were hastily recruited under Gen. H. Whiteside. The volunteers arrived at Dixon on May 12, a day after Black Hawk had evacuated the camp and travelled north 30 miles.

While following the red men, a Major Stillman sought and secured permission to take a small party on reconnaissance to the supposed Indian camp site. This was several miles east of the river. Black Hawk is reported to have sent six braves to confer with the soldiers. Some trigger-happy militiamen fired at the Indians, who bore a white flag of truce, killing two braves. This so infuriated Black Hawk that within an hour the Indians had charged, killed 11 soldiers, wounded others, and sent the Stillman detachment to rout.

Gen. Whiteside asked for reinforcements of regular army troops. With nine companies of federal infantrymen under Gen. Winfield Scott, the army marched north to where Beloit was founded a few years later. Scott's orders were to proceed down Rock River to its confluence with the Mississippi at Fort Armstrong. Stephen Mack, first white settler in Winnebago County, was the scout who led the regulars down the river from Macktown past Rockford.

Black Hawk and his army of braves escaped Scott's forces

by travelling west toward the Mississippi and thence north into Wisconsin. In July the Indians made an attempt to cross the Father of Waters into their homeland, but a contingent of soldiers gave battle and sent the Sacs further north with loss of 50 men. On August 2 the final battle of the Black Hawk War occurred in Wisconsin, near the mouth of the Bad Axe River. All but two score of the Indians were killed attempting to reach the Iowa shore. Black Hawk and his few remaining braves were turned over to Gen. Scott at Prairie du Chien a week later. In October the noted warrior was taken to Washington. He was released from protective custody and sent back home in June of 1833. He died 5 years later on the Sac reservation. Buried in his chief's regalia, under which were the "white man's clothes" given him at Washington, Black Hawk was interred, grasping the cane presented to him by Senator Henry Clay in the halls of Congress.

#### A TRIBUTE

Rockford Historical Society has lost a valued member with the decease on October 31, 1971, of Mrs. John Wahl Sr. (Mrs. Anna M.), 2409 Harlem Blvd. The following article about Mrs. Wahl's interest in museums and preservation of Rockford artifacts was written some time ago. Beside being a past regent of Rockford Chapter DAR and the present second vice regent, Mrs. Wahl was active in many civic and cultural activities. Some of these were: member of National Doll Club, New England Colony, Forest Hills Country Club, and Rockford Woman's Club. Her last scheduled service was to have been as guide for new members of Rockford Woman's Club to visit and learn about the early area history in the DAR Museum, at the top of the stairway in Rockford Woman's Club Building. Anne Wahl had lived 60 years in Rockford.



To have been associated with Anne Wahl in several of these organizations was to appreciate the way she supported any activity in which she had a vital interest. It was a cherished privilege to have been a part of her circle of friends.

ROCKFORD'S DAR MUSEUM  
Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

One morning recently, several friends informally viewed the artifacts of early days at the Rockford Chapter, Daughters of the American Revolution museum. This repository for Rockfordonia is located on the second floor of Rockford Woman's Club. It was completely redecorated in 1965. In it are, among other items, 200 articles of glass which have been catalogued and recorded. In an interview, January 14, 1971, Mrs. John J. Wahl, Sr., said, in speaking of the museum, "It is very important to list the dates of the person originally owning an item when such is an heirloom or has historic interest." The contents of the cases include china, glass, jewelry, and other materials, mostly dating before 1850. Many articles belonged to early Rockford families.

Mrs. Wahl, who is known to her friends as Ann, and her husband, John, were in Williamsburg, Virginia, in late December and the Christmas season. Among the seasonal events there were the Crowning of the Turtle, a special feast, and the Groaning Board, another special of the holidays. Mrs. Wahl had gained new ideas for museum work from her several visits to Williamsburg.

The two committees concerned with preserving historical items on which Mrs. John Wahl, 2409 Harlem Blvd., now serves are: Member Division II DAR Museum committee and Rockford Chapter DAR Museum Committee chairman. Other members of the local museum committee are Mrs. Walter Watson and Mrs. James Atwood.

To Mrs. Grace Brantingham Smith (Mrs. Reginald), about 1914, must be given the credit for starting the collecting for the museum. It has been fostered by the society as a repository for items which are meaningful in understanding our heritage. For a time the collection was displayed in



Mr. and Mrs. John Wahl, Sr., and  
their poodle, Jubilee Pierre



P. R. Walker

A Sampler that Hangs in the DAR Museum  
in Rockford Woman's Club Building



cases at Memorial Hall, and later at Burpee Art Gallery or the Park Board Building. About 1938 the present cases were made and installed in the room at Rockford Woman's Club. The first Mrs. Raymond Sheets contributed many years of excellent work for the Rockford Chapter museum.

The Rockford Chapter DAR was given a room and the use of Belle Keith Art Gallery for meetings, in the Rockford Woman's Club. Mrs. Ralph Emerson, first regent (1894-1897) of Rockford Chapter DAR, gave generously to the Rockford Woman's Club when it was built in 1911, with the stipulation that the Rockford Chapter DAR should always have a "Home" at the Woman's Club.

The twelve charter members of Rockford DAR obtained National Charter No. 102, October 23, 1894. These women were: Mrs. N. H. Baker (Mary A. Hall), Mrs. Horace Brown (Mary A. Thayer), Miss Harriett Blakeman, Mrs. Carrie Spafford Brett, Mrs. Luther Derwent (Emma Sherwood Wilde), Mrs. Ralph Emerson (Adaline E. Talcott), Mrs. Albert D. Early (Emma Blakeman), Mrs. Byron Graham (Mary Louise Hyatt), Mrs. William E. Hinchcliff (Harriett Emerson), Mrs. William Latrop (Sarah Adeline Potter), Mrs. Abby Warren Spafford, and Mrs. William A. Talcott (Fanny C. Jones).

Ann Wahl, who is a doll collector, has received national recognition for her personal doll collection. She served as sponsor for a fund-raising project during the planning for the 75th Diamond Jubilee celebration, in which an 1850 doll was the prize. This doll was again donated to the museum, where she is to stay. The child who had owned the doll was Ann Beatty, for whose family Beatty Park was named.

To the delight of a number of the very young, Mrs. Wahl acted as hostess and tour guide for a group of DAR Juniors and their young children. Rockford's early history came alive as she told stories of the people to whom the museum items had belonged. Some were especially charmed with the whale oil lamp. The mothers found the two pieces of Leeds wear that had belonged to Mrs. Treadwell to their interest.



Home of Mr. and Mrs. Ralph Emerson  
427 North Church Street



Not only does the museum committee collect, but sometimes it disperses articles. To honor deceased members or to enhance the historic Illinois Room of the national DAR museum, certain gifts have been made. Since Mrs. Wahl has served on the local museum committee, several valuable gifts have been given to the National DAR museum or the Illinois Room in Washington, D.C. During her regency in 1967 an 18th century creche figure was accepted by the NSDAR Curator General. In 1968 a gift was made of a Lowestoft antique cup and saucer. A beautiful early American decanter was presented to the Illinois Room of the National DAR in 1969. A pitch pipe that had belonged to a very young Revolutionary War soldier, who had become a fifer or a flute player, was another gift. Mrs. James J. Hamm is presently chairman of the Illinois Room, Mrs. Carl William Kietzman is Curator General of National DAR Museum, and Mr. J. H. Johnson is the curator. Before a gift is sent a detailed description and photograph are presented. If there is no need or space for the type of gift offered, the prospective donor is informed that the national museum has that item in its collection.

The local committee is negotiating concerning a gift of an antique sampler. If accepted, the suggested wording for the sign is: The sampler is given as a memorial to Miss Frances E. Walker, member of Rockford Chapter DAR and granddaughter of Patience Ann Remington, who was aged 12 in 1827.

Frances was the daughter of Peleg Remington Walker, Rockford educator. P. R. Walker was chosen in 1884 as the first superintendent of the united east and west side district. He commenced a career that lasted 30 years in Rockford. The high school in 1884 was temporarily housed in what is now the Chas. V. Weise department store and had about 150 students. It was under the guidance of P. R. Walker that Central High School was organized and dedicated March 18, 1886. Prior to Walker's arrival schools were named for the wards in which they were located. Walker inaugurated the idea of naming elementary schools after illustrious members of the Rockford community.

Peleg Remington Walker was born in Brooklyn, Windham

county, Connecticut, July 1, 1835. He came west with his parents and his grandfather, Albert Gallatin Walker in 1856. The Walkers settled first in Ogle County on a farm between Holcomb and Davis Junction. P. R., as he has been called, was 21 years of age when he reached this area.

In 1861, P. R. Walker graduated from Normal School in Normal, Illinois. In 1862 he enlisted for service in the War Between the States. The regiment left from Camp Fuller, October, 1862. He served in Company K, Ninety-second Illinois Infantry until mustered out, June 21, 1865. Later he was a member of Nevius Post, Rockford Grand Army of the Republic and of the Loyal Legion.

After three years as a Civil War soldier, Mr. Walker taught for eight years in Crest and eleven years in Rochelle.

Frances Walker recalled that her father had a hard time bringing unity after he became Rockford's first superintendent of schools. Frances finished the term of her father when he died after a brief illness, April 17, 1913.

The antique sampler of Patience Ann Remington is delightfully well preserved and would grace any wall. It is framed in non-glare glass of light colored mahogany wood. Its size is approximately 24" x 24". Coloring is distinct with pretty soft shades against the aged linen cloth. The alphabet as well as numerals are embroidered on the sampler. In capital letters are the words of the first line of the verse:

Industry--Love--Virtue--and  
Jesus permit they gracious name to stand  
As the first effort of this infant hand  
And while her fingers o'er the canvas move  
Permit her tender heart to seek thy love.

Next unto God, dear parents, I address  
Myself to you in humble thankfulness  
For all your care and charge on me bestowed  
The means of learning unto me allowed.  
So on I pray and let me still pursue  
The golden arts the vulgar never knew.

Patience Ann Remington--Age 12--A.D. 1827.

The sampler of twelve-year-old Patience Ann is very neatly executed. Young girls of that day learning to sew made samplers for practice or to show off their skills. A charming little design decorates the left edge beside the quotation.

The museum is not open to the public, but small groups have arranged with Mrs. Wahl to view the early Rockford heirlooms. There is not adequate room for holding a club meeting. The divan and tables are not intended for use but as display pieces and part of the decor of the museum. It is an intimate room in which inanimate artifacts from Rockford's past wait for the breath of life and history to be imparted by a person steeped in the lore of the area.

FIRST ROPE MADE IN WINNEBAGO COUNTY

By Hazel M. Hyde  
(Concluded from last issue)

A rope walk about 50 rods long was put up on Mr. Bull's farm, when he commenced the work of making this rope for the Rockford Ferry. Kent paid him \$35 for the rope cable when it was finished.

The next demand for Mr. Bull's rope was an order for a tremendous rope 2 inches in diameter to be used at Byron. Neighbors helped Mr. Bull handle the heavy work on this cable. The Byron ferryman paid \$75 for the cable. About forty years later, Mr. Bull, then 92 1/2 years old and celebrating his 60th wedding anniversary on the 17 of Sept., learned the Byron cable was still in existence in an old barn in Byron.



Another rope made by Mr. Bull was 150 yards long. It was made for the proprietor of Hamilton's Diggings in the lead district. The fee for this rope was \$62 in gold.

Eventually Mr. Bull was compelled to give up his rope walk and rope making. Many people could not pay cash for his rope. They could buy rope in the east on twelve months credit. Mr. Bull turned to some other endeavors which were profitable.

As to John Bull's genealogy, he was the last of sixteen children. He had records back to the Bulls of King George I's time. At the age of ninety-two and a half years, he had 80 living descendants, including six children, three sons and three daughters, 33 grand children (7 deceased in addition to these) and 22 great grandchildren. He was living then with his son Israel Bull, west of the A. Colton farm, in about 1887 or 1888.

(Editor's note: See Mar-Apr 1965, Vol II, No 3, p 4: "Site of Early Ferry")

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