

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

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## A BACKWARD LOOK

By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

(Speech for Education Department, Rockford Woman's Club, February 29, 1972---THE DIAMOND JUBILEE YEAR  
--After luncheon, in Belle Keith Art Gallery)

The talk today is entitled "A Backward Look." A dear old lady of my acquaintance, noted for her charm and poise cultivated the "backward look". When she arose from a chair, she carefully looked backward to be sure she had her belongings--then proceeded forward with confidence.

That is what history is all about. Take a look at the past and then face forward and take the required action.

Just at the point where Rockford was first built, a ledge of solid limestone extended across the river, making it easy to ford. It was used by the heavy wagons that transported lead ore and merchandise to and from Chicago and Galena. This rock ford became the first place of settlement. Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake were the founders in 1834 of the place first known as Midway and then as Rockford.

Picture the area. Only a few years had elapsed since Black Hawk and his warriors had been followed by the youthful Abraham Lincoln along Rock River, which the Indians called Sinnissippi.

Then the settlement grew to a pretty inland town. There was no railroad in Illinois save the Chicago-Galena laid twenty miles out of Chicago. The population was 2,500 when the need for a school was felt. Rockford had no organized public school but had two private schools.

It was a June day in 1849 when a school for young women was opened in Rockford by Miss Anna P. Sill and two associates. The school opened on July 11, 1849, with 15 pupils, not on the campus on the east bank of Rock River, but in a small building on the east side of the river formerly occupied by the first court house of the county.

The school grew and the ladies of Rockford raised \$1,000 to purchase the beautiful wooded grounds while the other citizens raised \$5,000 for buildings. In 1852 the corner-stone of the first building, Middle Hall, was laid. Two years later Linden Hall was built. In 1866 Chapel Hall and the connecting corridors followed. It was 20 years later that Sill Hall was built to contain the gymnasium and music room. In 1884, after 35 years of earnest work, Miss Sill resigned as principal of Rockford Seminary. Miss Martha Hillard, a graduate of Vassar, was the second principal. Rev. A. Kent of Galena was, according to Professor Joseph Emerson, speaking in 1876, the man most responsible for the founding of Rockford Seminary and its partner school, Beloit College in Wisconsin.

Ralph Emerson wrote in his Autobiography:

"Amongst my first recollections of Rockford were connected with the female seminary which when I came here was being conducted in a modern building near where the east

side Catholic Church now stands. The present Seminary grounds had been bought and in the summer Rev. Kent laid the corner stone of the present middle building. As it approached completion -- the next year -- there were not enough funds to finish it. And I got John Edwards (young John) to help me raise a subscription to finish it. It was a tough job and cost me what was then a large sum of money. But I had the satisfaction of seeing the chapel which was in the upper story plastered in time for the anniversary. The building was immediately filled with pupils, four or more to a room. The young men who had finished the building were of course always welcome.

"Think of such men as Austin Colton, Dr. Blount, myself, and others like us loading up with raisins, candy, figs, and all sorts of similar luxuries and marching over there on a winter's evening to give the whole Seminary a surprise party and took possession and ran the whole outfit, Miss Sill not in the least objecting. The teachers were a very earnest, hard-working set of women..."

The year was 1885 when Miss Jessie Spafford first became an instructor at Rockford College. Miss Jessie was born in a little red brick house in the North 8th and Hall street neighborhood. Then she lived for a short time on East State Street while the Prospect Street House was being built. She was about two years of age when this gracious house became her home. Amos Catlin Spafford, her father, and Elizabeth Burns White Spafford, her mother, had early observed that Jessie was a very alert, bright child.

(To be continued in next issue)

#### A CHALET FOR GRACIOUS LIVING By Mrs. John J. Wahl, Sr.

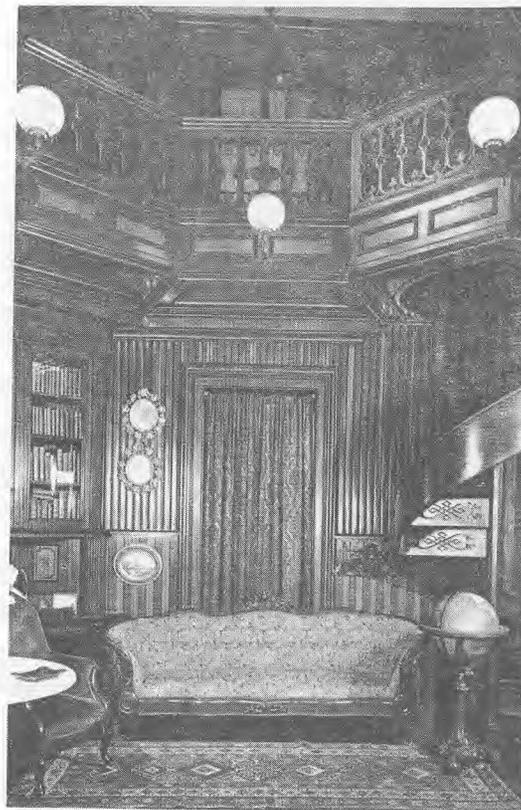
High on a limestone bluff, overlooking Kent Creek and a Midwestern landscape, is the home of the late Robert Hall Tinker. Mr. Tinker was born in Honolulu, Hawaii, December 31, 1836, the son of Presbyterian Missionaries. As a child of four, he returned to the United States with his parents. At the age of nineteen, while living in New York State, he was offered a position by a business agent, for Mrs. Mary Dorr Manny, Rockford, Illinois. Mrs. Manny was the wealthy widow of John H. Manny, inventor of the mower and reaper machines.

Mr. Tinker traveled for Mrs. Manny's firm through out this country and Europe. He achieved great success and admiration in the business world. He 1862, he brought back from Switzerland big contracts for the Manny machines but also his own sketches of chalets he had admired. By 1865 Tinker Swiss Cottage was under construction from one of these architectural drawings. Only the best of materials, wood and workmanship created this Swiss chalet--for gracious living.

Mrs. Mary Dorr Manny and Robert Hall Tinker were married in 1870 and they spent their honeymoon in Hawaii. Through  
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the years they traveled extensively bringing back to the chalet beautiful works of art from France, China, Austria, Germany, England and Italy. Regal rosewood furniture, French empire mirrors, Chinese canton vases, a two Hundred-piece setting of Dresden dinnerware, to mention a few of the handsome furnishings.

Some of the many paintings now at the cottage were purchased in Italy; one, a large blue Madonna, is of the 17th century in a frame of gilded limewood, hand carved. These beautiful objects were placed in various rooms along with especially-made furniture, and Vermont marble fireplaces. Tall windows of poured panglass and stained glass tops had wooded shutters that could be closed or opened wide to pour more light on the superbly painted murals of the walls and ceilings. The windows have enormous moldings. Many of the upholstered chairs have the original rose velou coverings. Brussels rugs cover most of the floors, and there are four large Oriental carpets still usable. Of the twenty rooms in the three-floor cottage, one of the finest is the library. It is an exact copy of Sir Walter Scott's library in Abbotsford, Scotland, winding staircase and balconies perfect replicas. A large collection of rare books line the shelves



The library of Tinker Cottage, copied after Sir Walter Scott's library in Abbotsford, Scotland, contains a very rare and interesting carved circular staircase. The sofa is the one used by Lincoln when he visited the home of John H. Manny in Rockford.

The master bedroom looks as though Mrs. Tinker had just made the beds and stepped out. This room is the most representative of Swiss architecture.



of the handsome bookcases, and a marble fireplace holding lovely bisque figurines add to the charm of this library. Here in this room are the sofa and chair, brought from Mrs. Tinker's former mansion, upon which Abraham Lincoln sat when he visited Rockford to represent the Manny family in the Cyrus McCormick-Manny lawsuit. The case was won finally by the Mannys, and Mr. Lincoln received \$1,000 which gave him his real start in law and politics. It has been said the \$1,000 financed in part his series of debates with Douglas. Mr. Lincoln was a frequent visitor to the Mannys and when he became President of the United States, Mrs. John H. Manny attended the inauguration. The beautiful gown that Mary Manny Tinker wore to the ball is on the form in one of the bedrooms at Tinker Cottage.

Mark Twain visited Mr. and Mrs. Tinker frequently as did many noted people of that era. Gracious and lavish entertaining went on for many years at the chalet. Mr. Tinker was Mayor of Rockford for one term in 1875. Hannah Dorr, Mrs. Tinker's sister, and two young nieces, Marcia and Jessie Dorr, kept the cottage lively with parties, and one Soiree was very much talked about!

Mary Dorr Manny Tinker died, and three years later Mr. Tinker married Jessie Dorr, Mary's niece.

Robert Hall Tinker passed away December 31, 1924, on his 88th birthday. He left his imprint on the cultural, political, historical, and industrial life of the city, and in Tinker Swiss Cottage, a heritage worthy of preservation and restoration.

Jessie Dorr Tinker lived eighteen years after Mr. Tinker died. The vast holdings of the Manny-Tinker fortune had begun to fade away for various reasons and so did the upkeep

and preservation of the beautiful Tinker Cottage. Tinker Park comprising 5.81 acres was deeded to Rockford Park Board District June 22, 1926, by Jessie Tinker as a memorial to her husband, Robert Hall Tinker. This was in accordance with the desire of Mr. Tinker to "establish for the benefit of the people of Rockford a permanent exhibit of the many items of historical interest in Tinker Cottage". Mrs. Tinker also named trustees to her estate. The trusteeship included all furniture, furnishings, books, antiques, heirlooms, wearing apparel, jewelry, and all tangible personal property. This was done March 20, 1937. Mrs. Jessie Dorr Tinker lived on at the Chalet until her death, March 31, 1942.

Tinker Swiss Cottage Association, Inc. and an auxiliary were established. Through these groups, and the trustees and many Rockford friends, restoration and maintenance have continued for many years. They like to think that their dedicated endeavors have attained and maintained the heritage and beauty of a by-gone era, and that Tinker Swiss Cottage is indeed "The Home of a Thousand Treasures and a Million Memories."

#### EARLY CITIZENS AND THEIR HOMES By W. Ashton Johnson

When Kent and Blake steered their hand-wrought log-boat down Rock River to present day Rockford, 138 years ago, they just "happened" to like the site where they stopped for rest before continuing south to Dixon.

Surveying the west shore of the river at the mouth of a creek, Kent decided that this would be the site of his saw mill venture. Blake, on the other hand, made ready to stake a claim on a section of land a mile and a half west of the river. This tract contained a grove of oak and walnut trees and the soil was rich, black loam.

Upon leaving Dixon, where claims for government lands were filed, Kent and Blake decided to retrace their steps to Galena and seek men to help found the new town site. Before the wintry blasts made the cutting of timber too perilous, Messrs. Squire Garner, Jefferson Garner, and Joseph Garner, all mill men, assisted Blake in erecting a substantial cabin. This was built not far from the south branch of Kent Creek about 16 blocks west of the river. Kent, in the meantime, had returned to Galena for the winter and did not return to his mill project until March of 1835. At this time, Blake and the Garners, who had cut mill timbers months before, set to work with Kent, assembling the saws and other mill fixtures.

Church's HISTORY OF ROCKFORD (Vol. 1; pp. 65-66) alludes to an unusual letter of Mr. Kent's to a J.B. Martyn of Alabama, in which he gives directions to reach "Midway". It read as follows: "At Galena, call on my brother. From there go directly west until you come to and cross Apple River, thence turn in a southerly course to Plum River, and from there to Cherry Grove. There leave some timber on your left

and a small grove on your right (later known as Twelve Mile Grove) and proceed until you strike Rock River, from which, follow a blind path to Midway."

While historians have marveled how Martyn arrived at his destination, this he did.

Explanations of how our Forest City derived its name are many. One story gives Mrs. Kent credit for suggesting that the town would be Midway between Chicago and Galena. Another interpretation relates that a group of settlers, Kent, Blake, and Daniel S. Haight, pioneer founder of the east side area, disavowed the "Midway" name and suggested "Rockford." A conference had been called in Chicago at the office of a Dr. Goodhue, to name the town site or mill privilege, in 1835. Despite this claim, it was officially called Midway in the statutes of 1835. Vandalia records show by 1837 that the town was known as Rockford, an English contraction of the Winnebago Indian tribe's name for Rocky-Ford.

Those first citizens, former lead miners, were surprised to see Daniel S. Haight and party arriving in early April of 1835, when he hailed from the east in a covered wagon. The ice remained in the river, despite a week of warm weather, so Blake, Kent, the others, crossed the stream and welcomed the newcomers. Haight and his band of explorers chose sites on the east bank. Late in the month, Haight returned to Geneva to bring his wife and son, his sister-in-law, a Miss Carrey, and a hired man. The Haight claim included the present four blocks bounded by E. State, Madison, Jefferson, and North Second Streets. Setting up a tent shelter under a large burr oak tree, the family "went to housekeeping" in the open. Mr. Haight returned to Geneva a second time to bring back remaining household goods when their substantial house was near completion. The first two white women settlers, Haight, and their employee occupied the double room cabin in early summer.

The H. F. Kett Co. city directory of 1877 contains an historical supplement of interest. In it is related the fact that Haight had previously explored Rock River, but had returned to Kane County and settled near Geneva by preference in "1833 or 1834". He later sold his Geneva holdings to a Squire Harrington, who later became a prominent Democratic politician in Republican Northern Illinois.

The Haight home, besides being the first residence built in East Rockford, also served as the first hotel, town meeting hall, post office, and circuit court room.

#### ROCKFORD NAVAL AND MARINE TRAINING CENTER

By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde  
(Concluded from last issue)

The forerunner of the Naval Reserve was in 1888 called the Naval Militia. At first these were mainly state organizations of areas along the coasts with the Governor being the commander. During the Spanish-American War members of

these militias volunteered to serve with the Regular Federal Forces of the Navy. Shortly after that war there were deep concerns about manpower. The bulk of this demand for men had been supplied from the merchant marine. A condition of competition of merchant fleets saw America operating fewer and fewer ships with American crews.

When Lt. Commander Wilson W. Elliott was introduced, a brief history of the Naval Reserve was read. These notes entitled "Pride Because of Heritage" meshed with all the background inspired by Sig Sandeen. Women of Rockford Chapter DAR gathered in Belle Keith Art Gallery, Rockford Woman's Club, to hear about the need for such groups.

The U.S. Naval Reserve was formally organized by Congress and the President of United States in 1915. In 1917 the program helped to provide men with some basic training for America's entry into World War I. The Naval Reserve provided 30,000 officers and 300,000 enlisted men to serve alongside the Regular Navy.

In the year 1925 the Naval Reserve Re-Organization Bill was passed by Congress. This created the Naval Reserve Officers Corp, established manpower requirements and standardized the training necessary for individual units.

In the vastly expanded fleet of World War II the years of preparation paid off. Three-fourths of the manpower, or 2,250,000 men were reservists. And again in the Korean War reservists were called to strengthen the fleet. In other emergencies they have served well.

The Reserve Program in Rockford started in 1947. Ship No. 1, Navy Club of the U.S.A., gave full cooperation. At first their club rooms were used for the weekly meetings. During the year 1948 the membership grew from a small group of Navy Veterans to 150 skilled reservists. To keep pace with the steady growth and active interest, the Bureau of Naval Personnel authorized the construction of a Rockford Naval Reserve Training Center. Occupancy and training began in the Center, February 24, 1950. The building was a modern two-story quonset type structure, located in Blackhawk Park, on Fifteenth Avenue.

Training is the focal point of the Rockford Naval Reserve Training Center. It is equipped with a wide variety of tools and instruments. The staff is a nucleus crew of seasoned veterans. A complete machine shop, carpenter shop, and work rooms give opportunities for the engineering personnel. Radio, electronic, navigation, and similar materials provide necessary tools for the various rates of the unit.

On June 25, 1950, our country was at war in Korea - and on August 21, 1950 the 217-man Rockford Marine Reserve left for active duty. Thousands were on hand in downtown Rockford to show their pride and appreciation. These young men were the first complete Rockford unit to be called up during the Korean War. They assembled at the Naval-Marine Training Center on 15th Avenue, then moved to the Chicago Burlington and Quincy Railroad depot en route to San Diego. These Marine Reserves were commanded by First Lt. William E.

Collins, later Rockford's corporation counsel.

Rockford Naval Reserve has ranked among the top units in the Ninth Naval District. In 1965 and in 1967 the Surface Division 9-17 received the Ninth Naval District first place award for outstanding performance.

The individual Naval Reserve member receives pay for each drill attended and there is a generous retirement program.

The Training Center here is commanded by Lt. Commander W. W. Elliott, USNR. The Naval Reserve units of Rockford Center are Surface Division 9-17 commanded by LCDR J. Streets, USNR-R; Military Training Division 9-13 commanded by LCDR R. W. Reynolds, USNR-R, and Construction Battalion (Sea Bee) Division 9-35 commanded by CDR M. L. Richards, USNR-R.

Lt. Commander Elliott showed films and film strips and gave comparisons of U.S. naval strength with Russia, which now ranks second. He answered many questions after his speech. After he had been served refreshments, my question was aimed at learning how instruction is given.

He explained that the units in Rockford provide technical and professional training, employing classroom and laboratory methods. The training center is equipped with a considerable amount of real and simulated equipment for practical training. There are libraries of training textbooks, aids of many kinds, as well as projectors for showing projected material.

But there are no ships in Rockford! He answered that floating equipment or even ships in the active fleet are assigned by the Chief of Naval Operations. Shipboard training for a two-week period is provided whenever appropriate.

Can other groups hear and see the material we had presented? The answer was that there are about six choices of program of informational material available. One fascinating subject, for example, is Oceanography.

A brief biography of Lt. Commander Elliott will show the high caliber of officers placed in the Rockford Naval Marine Reserve Center. LCDR William Elliott was granted a degree in Business Administration in his hometown, Philadelphia, from La Salle College in 1961. He earned his commission in the Navy at the Officers' Candidate School at Newport Rhode Island. He has been assigned to the USS Darby, the USS Rhodes, the USS Boston, and then was assigned to the Naval Advisory Group, Military Assistance Command, Republic of Vietnam. Just before coming to Rockford he was a navigator and training officer, and again to Viet Nam to provide communications support. Then he assumed his present duties as commanding officer, U. S. Naval and Marine Corps Reserve Training Center, Rockford.

The Rockford Naval Reserve Center certainly is an integral part of our city's history.

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