

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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THE SAINT JAMES STORY

By Clem V. Burns

The story of this church, the oldest of its faith in this area, is interesting, in that it was a comparatively later comer to the Rockford area; and the reasons for this fact are several. The early explorers followed the rivers as their roads, primarily, with the result that the missionaries who accompanied them, for protection and transportation, did not come through the great expanse from Galena to Elgin and from Portage to LaSalle; so we have little in the way of early history and religion; also the fact that the first settlers in this city-to-be were largely of New England stock, and not generally Catholic; plus this fact which may be interpreted several ways: the coming of the railroads, with their typically Irish workmen and families, generally Catholic. These family groups leapfrogged ahead of the steel, and settlements evolved. One was in the Cherry Valley area; another was at Hartland, between Woodstock and Harvard, which was served as an out mission from Chicago, with St. Patricks informally established in 1837. This area was also known as Donnelly's Grove. And with the formal church there, in 1844, Father Hampston was serving the worshipers in Rockford, Belvidere, and Island, now known as Marengo.

Initially these areas were out missions from Hartland, but in 1851 a central point for these three parishes was moved from Belvidere to Rockford, as it was evident by then that Midway or Rockford was to be the most rapidly growing city of the three.

A parcel of land was purchased where Saint James rectory now stands, and within two years a church was erected here and the first entries in the parish record show a marriage and baptism, November 29, 1851. It is of interest to the writer that his grandparents, Tobias Burns and Mary Doyle, were married as shown in the parish records, but not apparently in Saint James, but rather as part of the mission work, in July 1851.

Father Hampston's health failed, and he passed away in Belvidere, but his body was brought here, and buried under the church at Saint James. For a short time a priest came from Freeport; and late the same year a Father Hamilton was sent; and it is recorded that one of his projects in the young parish was the procurement of pews.

In 1855 the first Saint James Parochial school was founded in a one room building used both as church and school; this building having been later moved to a site near Longwood and North Second Streets. This school was taught by lay teachers; the Dominican Sisters from Sinsinawa coming into the next school, in 1892. It is a matter of tradition that a Professor McHugh ruled with the proverbial "hickory stick"; and we find the names of a Mr. Duffy, a Mr. Stewart, and a Mrs. Adams, and others. The cornerstone of the church was laid April 28, 1867, with dedication and first services in

PRESIDENT'S CORNER

By

William Condon

September of that year.

It is interesting to examine the first financial report of this church February, 1861, and find so many names which are familiar: Burns, O'Brien, Sheahan, McMahon, Doran, Gill, Mannix, Shields, Corcoran, and others; and equally important were the disbursements, and "Reports hung at Church Doors" which include an entry of a credit for altar wine, 00.52-- could not use it. To Burpee for a desk; \$5.00; stove blacking: .10; and evidently there were troubles too, as we find an entry; bad bill: \$1.00, and bad money returned from workmen: \$2.00; one bad bill: \$5.00; a clock at \$5.00; and we find entries which seem to indicate the Professor McHugh was paid by the week, in varying amounts, perhaps related to the number of students attending, or extra activities related to the school, such as \$9.60, \$6.82, \$10.00; and one entry which may be interpreted as payment to Mr. McHugh for repairing pump, \$3.00, but two days later Mr. Flynn was paid \$5.00 for pump repair. The summation seems to indicate for the period June 3, 1860, to Feb. 12, 1861: receipts in cash, \$1416.11, and disbursements in an amount leaving \$10.63.

Something rather unusual is the presence of The Reverend Butlers, brothers, in the period 1876 to 1885, who had, of course, the entire city and the surrounding community as their charge, and were active in community affairs, one being the president of the Rockford Public Library, and he was invited to deliver the speech on the time of the opening of the new opera house. Both were fine musicians and welcomed for their singing.

Bishop P. J. Muldoon came to Rockford in 1908, and selected Saint James as his Pro-Cathedral, and was instrumental in the forming of new parishes such as the St. Anthony, Sts. Peter and Paul, and St. Stanislaus; Saint Mary's having been formed in 1885 to serve the west side of the Rock River and the countryside. Under following Bishops and Pastors, growth and gradual change have been evidenced, and climaxed by the new school plant under the guidance of Father Norbert Richter, the present pastor now assisted by Father McLaughlin; and Father Wentinck, sometimes referred to as the Police Chaplain, because of his work with, and for them, as well as for those unfortunate enough to come within their grasp.

This church has many traditions for the writer's family; it comes to mind that my father told of the family walking to church with their shoes hung around their necks, from the eastern part of Burritt Township, bare foot, and stopping at Kent's Creek to wash their feet, before proceeding to Mass; that an old city directory in the Local History Room of the Rockford Library mentions a Burns who lived at the corner of North Second and Hill and was a teamster, and likely a great uncle; that one story is that the Burns family for a short time lived down the hill from the church toward the river and operated a truck farm and kept a few cows; that Mrs. Burns' grandfather and others "pumped" a hand car from Pecatonica and Winnebago to Rockford for services; that several uncles and aunts were married there, cousins baptized and married, as was a brother; and we worship God there, thankful for everything which has come to us.

Our second annual Historical Tour will be Saturday and Sunday, October 7 and 8. Hours will be from 10 a. m. to 4 p.m. Tickets will be \$3.50 for adults and \$2.00 for students through High School age. We hope to have 3 new homes and 3 repeaters from last year. The three homes from last year will be the Wheeler Home, Peck Home, and the Spafford Home. Thus far the new homes will be Tinker Cottage and the Graham Home, and the 6th home is yet to be named. We will need volunteers for guides and ticket takers and we will need your help to make it as successful as last years tour was.

We are also coming along with our plans for the Rockford Museum Center. As you people know, this is a joint venture with the Swedish and Harlem Historical Societies. Approximately \$60,000 is in the bank with pledges of roughly \$75,000. We will need about \$95,000 and your support is needed in this venture also.

We are coming along with our Cook Book and before long hope to have this in print.

"FROM THE DAYS THAT BELONG TO THE AGES"

(Reported by the late Mrs. John Wahl, Sr. from material given by Mrs. Ransom Bradley, Pecatonica, Illinois, member of many societies and organizations in Rockford, including DAR.)

Mr. Ashton Johnson, Editor of "Loves' Park" newspaper, edited an article on Mr. George Haskell, which appeared October 5, 1964.

This is the story of George Haskell, who came to Rockford as a settler in 1840. In the early history of Rockford, Ill., he was to count in school teaching, practice of medicine, a learned student of horticulture, and an ardent theologian. During his twenty-eight years in Rockford he was an influence for good. He and the Rev. Whitman drove hither and you organizing Baptist Churches in the Northern tier of counties. He planted stately rows of black walnut trees in the city that are still standing. He and a brother-in-law presented Haskell Park to the city, and the site for Haskell school was also a gift. He will always be remembered by Rockfordites.

Over the years Mrs. Bradley has been collecting data on the life and poems of John Greenleaf Whittier. She, as well as the poet, has a direct line to the Founder, Thomas Whittier, who came to this country in 1638. Her ancestor, Nathaniel, and Joseph, the ancestor of the poet, were brothers. Each helped to build the Whittier homestead in 1688, which is standing today, one of our historical landmarks.

For this reason Mrs. Bradley was very much interested



Mrs. Ransom Bradley.
Her ancestor, Thomas
Whittier, came to
this country in 1638.

in reading in Mr. Johnson's article, that it had been proven that Mr. Haskell was "The District School Master" as portrayed in Mr. Whittier's poem "Snow Bound". She presented the paper to the Colony Board in October, 1966. Plans were made to dedicate a plaque to honor Mr. Haskell's memory.

Mr. Haskell was born in Harvard, Massachusetts, in 1799. His family moved to Waterford, Maine, when he was four.

In 1821 he entered Phillips Exeter Academy, matriculating at Dartmouth College. After two years he transferred to medicine and earned his degree as an M.D. in 1827. In 1824 he took a "Sabbatical" to earn money with which to continue his medical education--teaching school at Haverhill, Mass. for a single term.

An eager pupil named John G. Whittier stood out among his proteges as a star member of his class.

Years later, in 1866, "Snow Bound" was published. Until near the close of his life, Whittier could not recall the name of the school-master who in 1824 taught the District School. He was sure he came from Maine. At length he recalled that the teacher's name was "Haskell", and from that clue the Rockford pioneer was identified.

Whittier was often quoted in later years as saying he had but two teachers during his school days whom he considered fit for the position they held. One of these was Mr. Haskell, and both were college graduates.

Mr. Haskell and his family moved to New Jersey in 1866. He died in 1876.

Mr. Townsend Trowbridge, a close friend of the pioneer, said that Mr. Haskell was never aware that he had the poet for a pupil in 1824, or that he stood for the figure in "Snow Bound" brought to life by Whittier's poetic artistry. He died without knowing that his own portrait had been drawn by the East Haverhill lad.

On Monday, September 11, 1967, the "Rockford Colony of New England Women" dedicated a bronze plaque to the memory of George Haskell, "The District Schoolmaster" in Whittier's "Snow Bound."

Members of the dedication committee included: Mrs. C.

Avery Jones, Egan, Ill., Past President 1966-67, Mrs. Elmer Spiegel, Rockford, President 1967-68, Mrs. J. J. Wahl, Rockford, Mrs. Joseph Bean, Loves Park, Mrs. John G. Whiten, Rockford, Mrs. Ransom Bradley, Pecatonica.

Mr. Joseph Bean, Vice President of the Rockford Park District Board, accepted the plaque which has been placed on a large boulder near the center of Haskell Park.

Whittier--1807-1892-- wrote his masterpiece "Snow Bound" in 1866, in his 59th year.

This "Winter Idyl" has been described as "the greatest nineteenth century poem of its type".

It was written as a memorial to his family, a labor of love in which he pays fitting tribute to those "who have gone beneath the low green tent, whose curtains never outward swing."

He and his brother Matthew the School-Master, and Harriet Livermore, "The not unfeared, half welcome guest" were the only living members of the household group, who were gathered about the fireplace on the night of the memorable storm.

The poem was constructed to express his feelings for the section and the family which had produced and molded him.

If the day ever comes when the poems of Whittier, The Poet Laureate of New England, are no longer enjoyed--on that day the last Yankee will have died!

CEMETERIES OF ROCKFORD

By Taylor Decker

The first cemetery in Rockford was in Block 35 of the Leavitts plat of West Rockford. The Commercial House hotel was on the south east corner of this block, which would be the corner of Green & S. Court Streets. This small cemetery was in back of the hotel to the Winnebago side or to the west. The first burial was Henry Harmon who was drowned at the ferry in 1837. Second was Sarah Kent, daughter of Germanicus Kent, also in 1837. Third was Addison Phillips in 1839, and then came John Haskell, brother of Dr. Haskell in 1839, Mrs. James Mitchell in 1839, and possibly others.

It was decided that the city would expand and that another area for a cemetery must be found. Citizens then gave an area for a cemetery which was Block 53 of Morgan & Horsmans Addition, which was on the C. H. Richings estate equal to about the 900 block of West State Street, the cemetery being on the south side. Those that were buried in the old cemetery at Court and Green streets were moved there. The first new burial in this cemetery was the wife of Richard Montague; she died in 1842. It was used only until about 1844. It was then agreed by citizens to exchange this area for another.

The new cemetery area was south of Cedar Street on the south side in an area from Winnebago Street to about West Street; the depth of the area was about a block. All of those previously buried in the other two were moved here. This

area was used until about 1851-52, at which time there were about 175 graves.

In 1851-52 the railroads were coming into Rockford and they needed this area for railroads and switching and round-house area. They purchased it and again the cemetery was to be moved. The railroad was then Galena & Chicago Union. A cemetery association was formed in 1845 and it was organized as the Rockford Cemetery Association. Original trustees were John W. Taylor, Ephraim Wyman, Cyrus F. Miller, Richard Montague and Benjamin Kilburn. The railroad paid the Association \$1900 for the land. The front row of lots on Cedar Street were held by the association and sold privately, and they realized \$3812 from this.

In May of 1852 the Association purchased from Charles Reed, George Haskell and Nathaniel Wilder 33 acres for \$1200. The Association then made a contract with David D. Alling to move all the graves to the new ground at Greenwood Cemetery. At a special session of the legislature in June of 1852 the association was incorporated. The monies received from the railroad and sale of the lots left them with a sizeable sum of monies, which was used to beautify the grounds. The Cemetery Association still owns Lots 1, 2 and 4 just west of the corner of Winnebago and Cedar Streets.

At an early date Daniel S. Haight gave an acre of ground for a cemetery on the East side of the river. It was on Longwood Street about ten rods north of East State Street. It was little used and finally abandoned and those burials were moved to other ground. In 1847 Cedar Bluff Cemetery Association was formed, its trustees being E. H. Potter, Willard Wheeler, Bela Shaw, Selden M. Church, Hollis H. Holmes, and Lucius Clark. Final organization was made in 1851. Twelve acres were purchased from Bela Shaw for \$400. The tract was surveyed by Duncan Forbes in 1853. This remained as the only cemetery on the east side until Scandinavian Cemetery was organized several years later.

A BACKWARD LOOK

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

Miss Spafford early displayed unusual ability at school. After she had passed through grade school and high school in Rockford, she attended Vassar College, the University of Chicago, the University of Wisconsin, and the Polytechnic Institute of Zurich, Switzerland. When Miss Jessie attended the Polytechnic Institute she was the only woman and the Zurich faculty made her sit behind a screen so she would not distract the attention of the men students. Having thus prepared herself for her work, she returned to Rockford and for twenty-one years was in instructor at Rockford College.

It was the Rockford Female Seminary when young Miss Jessie went there to teach. She taught physics, chemistry, and Bible, later becoming head of the Math and Science Department. She wanted to extend her students' horizons as her own hori-

zons had been extended in her college days at Vassar. Her eager, inquiring mind wanted to encompass as much knowledge as possible; and she wanted her students, too, to know the satisfaction of putting their minds eagerly to work.

Taking up the subject of Genesis in her Bible class, she acquainted her students with theories about preadamites. She wanted the young women not only to read the Bible thoughtfully, but to read what men had said and thought about the Bible.

And then, one day, a delegation of men from the Beloit College Board of trustees which exercised a supervisory control over Rockford Seminary, conferred with the seminary head and advised him to curb Jessie Spafford's enthusiasm for extending horizons. If Miss Spafford is going to teach the Bible, well and good, they said; but it must be the Bible she teaches, and not theories about preadamites. Thereafter Miss Spafford refrained from amplifying the Bible instruction with interesting theories that men had spun about the scriptures through the centuries. But she did not refrain from thinking her own thoughts about the Beloit College board of trustees.

Many interesting stories can be found about Miss Jessie's teaching days. She continued at Rockford College until 1906. During a part of the twenty-one years she taught there she lived at the college. When she "commuted" she drove a horse from the North Prospect Street estate to the campus.

While Miss Jessie Spafford was absorbed in her teaching at Rockford Seminary, changes were taking place in Rockford. A number of clubs were formed. Five of these early clubs are still in existence. The Monday club dates back to 1877. The Century Club, organized to study Browning, was at first called the Columbian Club, taking its name from the Columbian Exposition. The Outlook Club was formed about 1892. Then there were the Mendelssohn Club and W.C.T.U. These clubs sent representatives to meet together to consider civic and humanitarian work women might perform. As a result, in 1897 a Federation of the Woman's Clubs of Rockford was organized. The name was changed in 1904 to Rockford Woman's Club.

It was the afternoon of February 3 in 1897, that twenty women met in Mrs. Perry's parlor on South First Street to consider federating Rockford Women's Clubs. These women were accustomed to group action. Some had worked with the Union Aid Society to relieve the distress following the financial collapse of 1893.

The women who served as president of the Federation were Mrs. Seely Perry and Mrs. Ella G. Root. They were followed by Mrs. N. G. Thompson and Mrs. William A. Talcott; and Mrs. Seely Perry served a second time.

The first general meeting of the Federation was held on the evening of April 27 in Westminster Church with 150 present. The first literary meeting was held May 27 in the parlors of Second Congregational Church. At this time Miss Julia Lathrop was the speaker and her subject was her work as a member of the State Board of Charities.

During the first year, with Mrs. Perry as president, the club sponsored the planting of potatoes on vacant lots to

help relieve unemployment. It was called Pingree Potato Patch, although other vegetables were grown. Mr. Pingree, mayor of Detroit, had pioneered this kind of project and the Rockford ladies adopted his idea.

In 1897, that first year, inspired by Miss Julia Lathrop, the club cared for many cases of neglected children.

And also in 1897, the club sent traveling libraries into 35 schools and gave 22 volumes to start a library for the north end.

It was 1899 that pictures of famous masterpieces were placed in the public schools.

In 1900 the club sponsored the appointment of a city probation officer and paid the salary of that officer from club funds from 1903 to 1907.

Miss Foote, the principal of Wight School in 1899, decided she would like to teach cooking and sewing. That was as controversial as the subject of teaching sex education is today. For one year the Woman's Club got behind her and furnished materials and cooking equipment. But then the School Board said "No, absolutely!" However in 1906 classes were again introduced.

The club secured the appointment of a woman member to the local board of Education in 1903. This involved a petition to the Mayor. Laura Potter Gregory was the first woman member of the Board of Education. There has always been a woman member since that time until 1970 when Marcella Harris' term expired.

Miss Jessie Spafford became the president of Rockford Woman's Club in 1907 and continued in that position until 1950, becoming honorary president for life. She had served as program chairman in 1906. Charles A. Church spoke of Miss Jessie as "One of those progressive, intelligent, and capable women whose name is closely associated with much of the civic and educational work of the city and county." She immediately said when elected as president, it was necessary to have a project or it wasn't worthwhile to be president! Mr. Church spoke of the Rockford Woman's Club having grown from 81 members when Miss Jessie took the helm to 1,000 in 1916. The year 1907 saw the Rockford Woman's Club with a woman-size project and working for the formation of what became known as the Farm School.

The Winnebago Farm School Association was organized January 21, 1907, at a meeting of citizens, called by Mrs. Seely Perry, chairman of a joint committee of the Rockford Woman's Club and the Forum. The president and directors obtained from the board of supervisors a 5-year lease of the Horsfall farm belonging to the county, and funds having been secured, proceeded to render the old farm house sanitary and habitable.

Some of you may be drawing mental pictures of these energetic women with their brooms, scrub buckets, and mops as they worked to clean the old house. Cobwebs were brought down and the windows shined.

In March 1908 the work began with half a dozen boys committed to them by the judge of the juvenile court.

The association also gave a helping hand to delinquent and dependent children.

Next the association incorporated, and secured ten acres

of land adjoining the Horsfall farm. On this they built a fireproof building. They constructed a manual training shop, built a large vegetable cellar, and set out an orchard.

Rockford Woman's Club member Mrs. Seely Perry was the president at the end of the first seven years.

The night the astronauts neared the moon for the first landing, the moon was a thin crescent in the Canadian skies. A Nova Scotia farmer exclaimed, "You'd think they'd at least wait till it was bigger than that!"

Rockford Woman's Club might have waited until it became bigger before plunging into some of its tremendous projects. But the leadership of this organization has never been timid. Repeatedly we must admire their foresight!

In 1907, the Rockford Board of Education asked the Rockford Woman's Club to run a school lunch program for the high school. The club women bought part of the equipment, hired a cook, and kept the books. The club women took turns serving and they were paid \$1.00 a day for their services. However, the women did not personally receive the money. It went into the Woman's Club treasury. Anything they could clear was profit to the woman's club.

Miss Jessie was deeply involved in the Woman's Club activities and yet she found time for other interests and a way to involve the women in these.

The Rockford Boy's Club was incorporated April 13, 1908. Miss Jessie I. Spafford was chosen president. At first the quarters were in the old YMCA building. And that work was supervised solely by volunteers. There wasn't a man on the board!

We see clearly the hand of Miss Jessie here, inspiring the women to give of their time to the upbuilding of physical, mental, and spiritual welfare of the boys of Rockford. She was a woman who searched out a project and built up the enthusiasm of other women to pursue it with energy.

In September of 1908 Mr. F. M. Duckles was engaged as superintendent of the Boy's Club.

When the old YMCA building changed ownership, it became necessary for the club to secure a new home. The Dr. H. B. Hale homestead, at the corner of South Madison and Walnut Streets, was purchased in 1910 and in use by September 1911.

And Miss Jessie Spafford, with a zeal for service and a sound business head, remained as president of Rockford Woman's Club but involved herself in yet other civic jobs.

About 1909 Miss Jessie was President of Rockford's School Board. You must visualize this energetic, vital woman with visions of things to be done and practical ideas for their accomplishment. We are told "municipal politics bubbled right merrily during her tenure as board president."

Under Miss Spafford's leadership the club continued to grow and to expand its horizons of necessary service.

In 1909 the club helped organize the Rockford Business and Professional Woman's Club.

In this year of 1909 the club campaigned for the building of a new modern jail.

This was before the postman said to the Little Woman, "You sure hit the jackpot today, Mrs. Occupant!" And the women weren't looking for identity; they were looking for

work to do.

The club sponsored the employment of a director of play-grounds for the children of Rockford and paid for his services from 1909 to 1912.

In 1913 the club opened the first social center in Rockford in the Little Stone House on South Main Street. This house had belonged to the Montague family and had been given to the Park District. They gave the use of it to the Rockford Woman's Club. Settlement houses were very much in the public attention for it was just about 30 years after Hull House. The purpose was to provide a recreational spot for the children and a place where immigrants could become Americanized. This was replaced by a newly constructed Montague House formally opened in 1928. It operated until 1957 when the building was closed. In 1961 the Montague House building was sold to New Zion Baptist Church. The Woman's Club carried the mortgage that was supposed to run for 20 years but was paid off in 8 years. Rev. Salter was the first minister of this colored Baptist Church and his congregation did a nice job of remodeling.

Problems were much the same in Rockford years ago, for in 1931, the club campaigned for city garbage collection.

A name closely associated with Rockford Woman's Club is that of Emerson. As you walk through the Memorial Room of the clubhouse, you see the portrait of Adaline Talcott Emerson. There is much to tell of Ralph Emerson, his wife and their family.

Ralph Emerson wrote, "The history of the reaper business coming to Rockford is this--Rockford was in 1852 and 3 the end of the railroad. And we used to sell goods that would go 50 or 60 miles west of us. Among our customers was John H. Manny then living at Waddam's Grove where he was building a few reapers. In 1853 he offered if we would trust him for material to build reapers with to move to Rockford. Mr. Blinn hesitated and left the decision to me and so Mr. Manny came to Rockford. It was soon evident that he would not have capital enough to do the business and after considerable negotiations I was able to effect a partnership between him and Wait Talcott--Thus the coming to Rockford of two men of very marked ability, who were to exert a great influence on its whole future. Their success was great for those days. They were known as the J. H. Manny & Co. In the summer of 1854 there was a great Reaper Trial on Squaw Prairie just north of Belvidere for a prize of \$1,500. To my surprise I was chosen one of the three judges to award the prize. Mr. L. Dunlap, the Agricultural Editor of the Chicago Tribune, was another, and we two chose Horace Miller as the third judge. And thus it came that I who had never before seen a handful of grain cut by a machine was called to aid in deciding the very important contest. The trial lasted several days. I thought Mr. Manny's reaper the best. Mr. Dunlap thought the Adkins self-raker the best, and poor Mr. Miller could not tell which of us was right. So it was declared a drawn game. But Mr. Manny reaped nearly all the fruits of substantial victory, by advertising all over the country that the Adkins reaper had been unable to win the \$1,500 prize away from him.

"It was the first time that I had seen a Reaper cut and it

please me so well that when in the fall Mr. Manny urged me to join the manufacturers, I readily consented. A new firm called Manny & Co. was formed, consisting of John H. Manny, Wait Talcott, Sylvester Talcott, myself, and Jesse Blinn..."

A romance is always of interest. The story continued and Ralph Emerson wrote in his Short Autobiography:

"While Wait Talcott had gone east, to see Mr. Boyd., His daughter Adaline came to the office one day and said she had an opportunity to go to teaching in the east side High School and asked my advice. I don't think she needed much advice but wanted the approval. Of course I told her it was a noble thing to do and her Father found her hard at it to his joy when he got home. I wonder how it happened accidentally at times that I should be driving past their house just as she started for school and took her over. An acquaintance so formed and perfected while each of us was doing our best, and that best was very good, could of course have but one result.

"It was the next fall that we were married; we had intended it should be on her birthday (in October) but I got impatient..and so it happened on a bright September morning.."

"The children came fast; Adaline was very self-reliant. Almost as soon as she could run I found her one day running around the streets south of Holland House alone; of course she was lost but appeared to enjoy it. Old Mr. Woodruff did not know who she was, but had been following her around for some time to keep her out from under the horses' feet, hoping some way to find whose child she was. We have tried never to forget that kindly old man..."

"Mattie came, a cooing child, who enjoyed nestling in her mother's arms and looking up with her great blue eyes at the sunshine on the wall. When she learned to walk she had a cold so that we kept her off the floor all winter, we had no furnace then; we used to turn the iron lounge with its front towards to the wall in the dining room so that it made a little yard..."

Mary was a most beautiful child and her aunt Mary Pettibone took great pains to dress her and show her off. A little ringlet of her childhood hair I still have..."

"Then came another quiet blue-eyed soul. What there was about her we could not tell. There had never been a Belle Emerson in the family but no other name would fit her..."

"It was on a Sabbath while we were at communion table I think the fire bell rang and I went over the river to do my part...Just then a messenger came for me saying I had better go home in a hurry; the red horse trotted over the bridge none too fast; and so it came that Ralph was born amid the ringing of fire bells.

"There is no need to tell of Dora, you all know how she got the name of Bay; first of all the children to distinctly name herself..."

Ralph and Adaline Emerson's daughters were married and we know them by these names: Mesdames N.F. Thompson, W.E. Hinchliff, E. P. Lathrop, D. M. Keith, and W. M. Wheeler.

This entire beautiful building, the Rockford Woman's Club, is a memorial in brick and furnishings to Adaline Talcott Emerson.

She wrote to her father, the Honorable Wait Talcott, when she was one of fifteen delegates to the World's Paris Exposition of 1888, appointed by the Governor of Illinois.

The portion which seems best to quote from her letter dated Munich, Bavaria, Thursday, July 2, 1888, is not the description of the lovely walled old city Rothenburg, Russia's magnificent displays, or appreciation of the art of Florence. It is a message which must have been, in a way, to us today:

She wrote: "What of it all can we remember, do you ask? I know not but this I do know, the rich experience comes, not from the present sights, but from the past history of times and scenes that cluster about you, and memory's gallery is hung with many a masterpiece of art, and dust of years rubbed off from many more, collected in the past."

The letters of Ralph Emerson to his daughter Belle, who became Mrs. Darwin M. Keith, cover the years 1883 through 1905. They are entitled "Demure Daughter Belle", and were edited by Katherine M. Hinchliff, October 1942. It was for Belle Keith that the art gallery in which we are seated was named.

In a letter written while waiting for a train to return to Rockford, Ralph Emerson wrote to Belle, Friday, September 21, 1883:

"My dear daughter Belle:

"Do you know why I am writing to you? If you don't I do. It is because I love you, and I want to tell you so even though you know it already..."

In the same letter he continues; "I love to think what you are doing, and I sometimes think when you are at work that you think "that will please father". How do you find it anyhow? Are you agoing to try your hand on sculpture this year? I like to think of you as enjoying your art."

Try to sit here now in this beautiful Belle Keith Art Gallery and steal a look at the current exhibit; yet project yourself backward to the time when Belle Emerson Keith was alive and vibrant, involved in creative expression and a lover of art.

Back in Rockford from a trip to Europe, Ralph Emerson wrote to Belle:

"...That European idea looked quite attractive to me at a distance but it is like some wild flowers the moment you pick them, they lose part of their beauty. And before you get them home, they are already faded or beginning to drop to pieces. America is good enough for me for a while yet any how.

"Nevertheless, we do propose to have the fun of taking you to Europe with us sometime if you are not so foolish as to get married first, So don't be in a hurry about that, little girl--do you hear?"

(continued in next issue)

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