

# Nuggets of History

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## ROCKFORD SWEDISH MUTUAL FIRE INSURANCE COMPANY

On May 20th, 1873, a meeting was held in the Sunday School room of the First Lutheran Church for the purpose of organizing a mutual fire insurance company for the Swedish people of Rockford and vicinity. Rev. Gustav Peters, pastor of the church, presided over the meeting, and John Lidell was appointed temporary secretary. At this meeting the Rockford Swedish Mutual Fire Insurance Company was formed, and a list of proposed by-laws was drawn up.

On May 26 of the same year the first officers and directors of the company were chosen. Elected president was John Erlander, who had come to Rockford in 1854. A tailor



John Erlander, born in Slätthog, Småland, Sweden on April 7, 1826

by trade, Erlander later became active in the furniture industry, serving first as president of the Rockford Union Furniture Company, and later as president of the Eagle Boot and Shoe Company and vice president of the Excelsior Furniture Company. His home at 404 South Third Street is a museum owned by the Swedish Historical Society of Rockford.

The first **secretary** elected by the Rockford Swedish Mutual Fire Insurance Company was Gustavus A. Salstrom, a grocer. Salstrom later worked at Central Furniture Company, rising to the vice presidency of that firm. He served as alderman from the sixth ward for a few years, and became secretary, treasurer, and manager of Rockford Union Grocery Company. Salstrom lived at 1133 Third Avenue.

Andrew Kjellberg, a cabinet maker residing on Union Street, was elected to be the first treasurer of the R.S.M.



Home of Gustavus  
A. Salstrom  
1133 Third Avenue

F.I. Company. He was employed at Union Furniture, but after 1882 his name no longer appears in the city directory, so apparently Kjellberg had either died by then or moved out of town.

The Directors elected to the board that first year were John Lidell, C. Moberg, Issac Peterson, G.A. Salstrom, G.N. Stockenberg, L. Segerstrom, Andrew Kjellberg, Nels P. Nygren, John Erlander, and Sven A. Johnson. Lidell, who lived at 343 Bremer Street, was for a time the teacher of the parochial school (Swede School) operated by the First Lutheran Church. Lidell's daughter, Mrs. Mary Kuter, is presently a resident of the Alma Nelson Nursing Home and recently celebrated her 107th birthday.

Peterson, a tailor in Rockford for many years, lived at 528 South Fifth Street. Nygren, a blacksmith, resided at 1112 Fourth Avenue, presently the site of a small parking lot across the street from Lyran Hall. Johnson, another tailor, was a partner of Erlander for several years, later becoming involved in other business enterprises. He lived at 402 Kishwaukee Street.

The by-laws of the company stated that the directors were to meet every Monday night at eight o'clock, and the Swedish language was to be used for all meetings and records. The books containing the minutes of the meetings indicate that the Swedish language was used for sixty years.

The first annual meeting was held on January 6th, 1874. The treasurer reported that 92 policies had been written, and \$272.45 in premiums had been received. Rockford's population at that time was about 12,000. At the annual meeting on January 5th, 1875, it was reported that 119 policies were in force, and the total amount in the bank after expenses had been paid was \$316.55.

On Friday, May 25, 1973, the company celebrated its 100th anniversary with a reception, held in the meeting

room at Home Savings and Loan Association. The gathering was well attended by policyholders, directors, and officers as well as by representatives from various other neighboring casualty companies. The celebration was somewhat marred, however, by the fact that three very faithful members of the company did not live quite long enough to participate. Arvid V. Peterson was secretary-treasurer from January of 1930 until his death in March of 1972, at which time his son, Herbert V. Peterson was elected to succeed him. Mrs. Maude Gibson was office secretary from 1935 until her death in August, 1972, and was then succeeded by her daughter, Mrs. Anita Anger, who had previously been her assistant. Bernth Wessman, the late president, passed away on June 26, 1972, and Arnold W. Johnson was then elected president.

Mr. Johnson had previously served as vice president, so when he was elevated to the presidency, Hilding Stark, another long-time member of the board, was elected vice president. The other incumbent directors are Robert H. Borden, William L. Farb, Ralph C. Glans, Elvin F. Rydell, and Ralph H. Wessman. Another director, Adolph H. Hawkinson, recently passed away, and as of this writing his term had not yet been filled.

#### SEWARD TOWNSHIP

By Miss Juniata Scott  
and Mr. Clair Scott

(Concluded from last issue)

Other farms that have been in the same families for more than a hundred years are: Charles Comly settled in 1855 on Conger Road. In the 1870 Census he was one of the richest men in the township. He came from Pennsylvania, and his ancestors came over with William Penn. The land is owned now by Charles Comly, a grandson. The Short farm too has been in the family for more than a hundred years. It is occupied by Roger Neely and family. His great-grandmother, Mrs. Mary Short, went to the death beds of those stricken with cholera at the old Tavern at Vanceboro on Highway 20.

The Faulkner Farm on Kendall Road, owned by Charles Faulkner, is another example. His great-great-grandfather John Faulkner, obtained the land from the Land Office at Dixon in 1849. They, too, came from England. The James Conger Farm, West Edwardsville Road, is now owned by the grandson, Floyd Conger.

The village of Seward began when the Illinois Central Railroad was built through the township in 1887. Before that all religious and social activity was at Seward Center, one-half mile north of here, where the new Congregational Church and village town house were built in 1868. As the village developed the church was moved to its present location on the main street.

Part of the farm of George Tracy was platted, a post



The Scott home in Seward. The front part is very old and was owned by a relative of Squire Lawrence McDonald. It was moved to the village more than 50 years ago.

office was opened. Industries sprang up -- general store, hardware store, village hall, B. P. Hill Grain Company and a mill and creamery. Seward was almost wiped out by fire in 1904. Telephone wires burned off and the alarm was spread to cities by telegraph.

Dr. Amos Scott, civil war surgeon, was the first physician and he is a great-great grandfather of one of your members. Dr. Charles Martin, beloved physician and surgeon, was instrumental in consolidating the rural school districts, and the first consolidated school in the state was built and dedicated in 1904. A nephew, Dr. D. D. Martin, continued his practice. Some of his poetry appeared in Barney Thompson's "Column Left".

Another of Clair Scott's relics was passed around and he told about the occasion of finding it on the school grounds. He formerly spent some time trying to influence young people in choosing hobbies ranging from interest in



C. G. Scott on his 90th birthday, November 8, 1970. The Boston rocker belonged to his grandfather, Aquilla Spencer, who purchased it at Burpee's furniture store in Rockford



Clair Scott at the age of 92, seated in the Boston rocker. His dog "Tippy" is at his side

Indian relics to other interests. He spoke of the buffalo wallow east of the grounds. There are several buffalo wallows in the township if you are skilled in knowing what signs to look for.

The year 1904 brought the first rural mail delivery with Johnnie Fry making the twenty-six mile trip through sunshine, rain, sleet or snow, and he continued for more than thirty years.

Seward people were proud when Logan's Pure-bred Holstein cow, Side Hill Ormsby, won the world's record in milk and butter fat. The record in milk production has never been surpassed. John R. Logan was a Winnebago County supervisor for more than thirty years, and his son Ross just retired as Winnebago County supervisor after serving seventeen years.

Floyd Conger, one of Seward's most noted senior citizens, has had a hobby of exhibiting his prize-winning Clydesdales at parades and fairs in Illinois, Wisconsin, and Iowa. Seward also boasts the smallest sanitary sewer district in the state--perhaps the nation. We have a general store where everything from frozen pizza to men's work shoes can be found. Seward Screw Products has thirty employees, and we have Produce and Supply, a Lumber Company, a body shop, a garage, modern slaughter house and processing plant, fertilizer plant, an electrician, fire station and Volunteer Fire Department, road commissioner, insurance agent, and an antique shop. The bank closed during the depression, and we no longer have the yearly Horse Show and Fair.

Most of all we are fortunate enough to have a dedicated physician and surgeon, Dr. Everett Falconer, on call day and night. At spare moments he is working on his inventions, consulting at Seward Screw Products, or grinding corn, wheat and rye for his friends. Another equally dedicated servant is Rev. Dale Beaman, minister of Seward Congregational Church, who with his wife and children, have

made Seward a nicer place to live.

Now, to return to the past --If you think Dr. Stillman's water cure is something --listen to this excerpt from a letter written by John Rogers--from Vanceboro, Seward Township, 1851--

"Emily's health is better than formerly. She takes the Water Cure Journal and has adopted the practice of bathing frequently and has received benefit from this practice."

Clair Scott remembered that when he was young he saw passenger pigeons. He told how men made a ditch and a net and baited it, thus netting hundreds of the carrier pigeons at one time. It has been a great loss to have had these wonderful birds slaughtered in large numbers.

HONOR PAID THE MEMORY OF  
MELINDA JANE PERHAM ROBERTS  
By Hazel Mortimer Hyde

The year was 1899 and a member of the Rockford Chapter DAR addressed the membership. The words she used have been preserved in the family of Mrs. Melinda J. Roberts. In late 1970 and early 1971, the Rockford Chapter made an effort to mark the grave of their second "real daughter", which means a member whose father fought in the Revolutionary War. All members are direct lineal descendants but may be from four to six generations removed from the actual soldier. Due to cemetery restrictions, the placement of lettering on the original stone, and many obstacles, the grave cannot be specially marked. Mrs. Roberts' memory was honored at the May Breakfast, May 21, 1971.

Not only did we learn that Melinda Jane Perham Roberts, deceased February 15, 1912, and buried at Forest Home Cemetery, Forest Park, Illinois, was an early member of Rockford Chapter, but we presently have a member descended from Ezekiel Perham. Mrs. Paul C. Johnson (formerly Jeanette Roberts), 1620 Chelsea Avenue, read the paper written in 1899. She explained about its origin, how her family had treasured it, and made copies available for the genealogical records committee, of which Mrs. Harold B. Hyde was the 1971 chairman. It is printed here in NUGGETS OF HISTORY exactly as given in 1899;

"Daughter of a Revolutionary Soldier"

In exact proportion to the growth of our National prosperity and power, do increasing luster and interest gather around the humble and honest beginnings of American History. With the outgoing of the present century there will vanish from our midst many of the honored generation whose fathers won for us the first bitter fight of our country - the Rev-

olution. Their lips alone can tell us those delightful reminiscences which overlap the years and bring us face to face with the sturdy old Revolutionary heroes, who swim before our eyes a halo of smoke and glory.

Now while it is yet possible, every effort is being made to discover these children of the Revolution, wherever they may be, and to obtain any information they may possess, however simple or meager, concerning the personalities and experiences of their fathers. Since from time immemorial, the oldest and the youngest have always been of special interest, I take great pleasure in presenting the following simple sketch of the youngest known daughter of a soldier of the Revolution, Mrs. Melinda J. Roberts, of Chicago. Mrs. Roberts, though a member of Rockford Chapter, is at present living with her daughters in Chicago. She will celebrate her 75th birthday in February of the present year (1899). Her hair is yet as brown as in the fifties, her mind bright and active, her carriage erect and her step light. When a member of the family asks for any assistance she is first to be upon her feet, to the amusement of the rest of the family. Her manner and words are the essence of good breeding and natural sweet womanliness.

In spite of her mildness, Mrs. Roberts is double-dyed in her Revolutionary descent, being not only a daughter, but a granddaughter of a Continental soldier. Her grandfather, Ezekiel Perham, came to Massachusetts from England. His wife was Eunice Shattuck. His son Ezekiel was born on a farm at Pepperell, Massachusetts May 27, 1764. When the war broke out the older Perham enlisted in the 7th Co. of the Third Massachusetts Regiment and served until it became absolutely necessary for him to return to his family and dying wife. His son, then only 16 years of age, voluntarily enlisted as his father's substitute. The young Ezekiel served as a regular soldier, an unusual thing for so young a lad. His reminiscences were mostly of camp life and of the people about him. He served the last three years of the war, and three months after the close to help store the ammunition. His discharge paper, signed in 1783, is a most interesting document. This was in Mrs. Roberts' possession. Having become worn and torn, it was pasted on linen and in 1895 was again re-inforced on town plot paper that it might be preserved for future generations. It contains the information that Ezekiel Perham of the 7th Co. Third Massachusetts Regiment was honorably discharged at West Point. At the bottom appear the name of Brigadier General W. Jackson and John R. Stafford. Mr. Perham's stories used to delight the crowd of young people who gathered at his home, to hear "Uncle Ezekiel", as they called him, tell war stories.

He was especially fond of mimicking a fiery old French General named, I believe, Honden, under whom he served at one time as guard of prisoners en route from Philadelphia. The boy delighted in making use of the old general's apparent fondness for him for the benefit of his fellow soldiers.

At one time he changed his good shoes for a wornout pair of a comrade, knowing a new pair could be forthcoming as soon as his feet caught the eye of the general. Of the privations of war he had vivid recollections. At one time the company, after having nothing to eat for two days, broke their fast on horse flesh. Like every other man of his time, he deeply venerated Washington. In building a certain causeway, over very swampy ground, the entire regiment was ordered into the water at one time. The work went badly and the men suffered much from exposure. Soon Washington rode up on his big horse, ordered a halt and severely reprimanded the officers for exposing their men in such a manner and commanded them to build by companies one at a time, that they might have a solid foundation from which to carry on their labor. The men fared better after that and the work progressed faster.

No more substantial and important records have been preserved, with exception of his discharge paper - only a few leaves of his diary have been found. Soon after he came out of the army, he married a Miss Elizabeth Jewett. She died some years later and in 1817 he married Miss Phebe Oaks - her maiden name was Phoebe Allen. Her parents were Desire Jones and Josiah Allen, of Vermont.

The children of Ezekiel Perham and Phebe Oaks were Mrs. Lavern M. Perham Carter, born at Athens, Vermont, 1618 - now living at Cattaraugus, New York, and Mrs. Melinda J. Perham Roberts, born at Athens in 1824. After living at Athens, the Perhams moved to Windham, Vermont. The hill on which their house was situated was so steep that Melinda had to run pellmell all the way in Summer and in Winter she slid down at a break neck speed. When Melinda was 16 her family moved to Berryburg, New York, going over the Green Mountains by wagon to take the canal packet boat at Troy, N.W. where they went along through green woods which adorned its banks. When Melinda was 19 her father died, aged 79. To his Benjamin as he called Melinda (the child of his old age he said when dying with all the solemnity of his fine sturdy nature) "Learn to be prudent, learn to be wise, daughter, get wisdom, get understanding, get a true heart". His daughter remembers him well at this age. He was six feet high and strongly built. His iron grey hair and high forehead, firm face, gave him a look of dignity and honesty, which was made more winning by his genial nature. He had a strong constitution and was never sick a day until the last few weeks of his life. So passed a good man, more to be honored for his life than for his connection with the dawn of National Freedom.

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