

# Nuggets of History

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A FORMER ROCKFORD PHYSICIAN  
By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde

The office of George Washington Brown, physician and surgeon, was listed as 111 West State Street and his residence at 807 Pecatonica Street in HISTORY OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY, ILLINOIS, by H. F. Kett, published in Chicago in 1877. The facts that followed portray a very versatile man with many varied abilities.

Dr. Brown came to Rockford in April of 1865. He was born in Moria, Essex County, New York, October 29, 1820. He married Lorinda G. Heath, who had been born April 23, 1830, in Geneva, New York, and their wedding date was June 1, 1860.

The newspaper field and writing attracted George Brown early in his career. In 1847 at the age of about 27 years, he established the Conneautville, Pennsylvania, COURIER and continued it until the fall of 1854, when he transferred it to two of his apprentices, A. J. Mason and Daniel Sinclair.

In 1854 George W. Brown removed to Lawrence, Kansas. Accompanying him were a colony association composed of three hundred old friends and acquaintances. He continued his writing and publishing in Lawrence. Here he established the Kansas HERALD OF FREEDOM, the first number of which was issued in September, 1854, before leaving Pennsylvania. The second number was issued from his office in Lawrence in January, 1855. Mr. Brown had moved his press, type, and other fixtures to Kansas. His was the first free state paper to be established in Kansas and it continued until after 1860, after the admission of Kansas to the union as a free state. He claimed a circulation of 8,000, which must have been a record for local journalism of that time. After the admission of Kansas he concluded his work for freedom and as a journalist was completed so he disposed of his newspaper.

Newton Bateman and Paul Selby in the HISTORICAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF ILLINOIS, published in Chicago in 1916, stated, "An oil painting of Rockford's most historical character hangs in the Kansas state capitol at Topeka. It is that of Dr. George W. Brown, who died in Rockford, February 5, 1915, at the age of ninety-four years..." They verify that in 1854 Dr. Brown founded the HERALD OF FREEDOM, the first free state newspaper published in Kansas. His office in Lawrence, Kansas, was destroyed by outlaws according to their account, and his material thrown into a river. As an editor he was credited with helping to mold public opinion.

George W. Brown had commenced reading law in Pennsylvania under Joshua R. Giddings. He had been admitted to the bar in Pennsylvania in 1846. So he next turned to the practice of law in Kansas. He located at Paola, Kansas, and continued law practice until he came to Rockford in

1865.

In Rockford, Brown turned his attention to medicine, being a graduate of Eclectic Medical College of Pennsylvania at Philadelphia. He gave his attention primarily to the manufacture and introduction into use of the Electric Vapor and Medicinal Bath apparatus, which was covered by patents dated May 25, 1875, Feb. 8, 1876, and Dec. 26, 1876.

Three books written and published by George Washington Brown are to be found in the local history room of the Rockford Public Library. One is "Reminiscences of Old John Brown" with two sub-titles: "Thrilling Incidents of Border Life in Kansas" and "The Truth at Last--History Corrected". This book is 80 pages in length. He seemed to have the idea that other men did more important work for abolition. This book was stereotyped and printed in Rockford, Illinois, by Abraham E. Smith, 1880. In his dedication he says in part, "...It has been truly said that the early history of all nations is founded in myth, as is that of the world of fable. The American States, though their origin is so recent, are not exceptions; and even Kansas, with an organized existence but little exceeding twenty-five years, is subject to a like condition..."

A second slender volume of 160 pages is entitled "False Claims of Kansas Historians Truthfully Corrected". George W. Brown had this volume printed and published in Rockford, Illinois, 1902.

The third book is entitled "Reminiscences of Gov. R.J. Walker with the True Story of the Rescue of Kansas from Slavery" by George W. Brown, M.D., Honorary Corresponding Secretary of the Historical Society of Kansas. It too was printed in Rockford in 1902 by the author.

THE REGISTER-GAZETTE'S HISTORICAL BIOGRAPHICAL, INDUSTRIAL EDITION of December 1904 has a section entitled "Books Written by Rockford People". Here is listed "Dr. George W. Brown's 'Researches in Oriental History', which had four editions. It was an inquiry into the origins of Judaism, Zoroasterism, and Christianity.

Dr. Brown had in his Rockford office bound files of his newspaper, HERALD OF FREEDOM. Dr. Brown claimed the distinction of furnishing a truthful statement of the alleged adoption of the Lecompton Constitution in Kansas to Stephen A. Douglas, upon which, he claimed, the senator repudiated that measure and broke with the Buchanan wing of the Democratic party.

Two letters in Dr. Brown's handwriting exist. He was living at 907 Kilburn Avenue, Rockford, when he wrote these letters. One, dated February 3, 1906, discusses his investigations of spiritualism. He stated, "I am now in my 86th year." He speaks of his book ORIENTAL RESEARCHER, too, saying in part, "I am pleased to learn you have read, and were pleased with my ORIENTAL RESEARCHER. Four large editions were quickly exhausted, and it has been out of print some eight years. But for my age I would put a revised edition to pen. Much of it was written more than 20 years ago. Since then I have remained a student, and have investigated more deeply along the lines I wrote..."

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The second letter is dated January 25, 1908, and addressed to Victor S. White, Esq. The handwriting is precise and the wording formal. He began, "My Very Dear Sir: You have my earnest thanks for your letter of the 21st, to hand yesterday..."

The Spiritualist movement which engaged Dr. Brown's attention for a time, began at Hydesville, New York, in 1849. It stirred much interest and many people reported hearing rappings. Dr. Brown appeared to feel there were some frauds but that some of the reports had the ring of truth.

In his life span of 94 years, Dr. George Washington Brown worked in newspaper publishing, had a law practice, practiced the medical profession, and had time to write and publish at least four books. While many people have not agreed with Dr. Brown's views, he must be credited with having been a deep thinker and a serious reader. His life was filled with exciting and varied adventures that made those years both difficult and challenging, but they appear to have been personally and individually rewarding.

#### HISTORY OF ROCKFORD CHURCHES

By W. Ashton Johnson

The First Methodist Episcopal Church, the mother of the Methodist churches of Rockford, was located, according to old city directories, "on South Second Street, east side", and represents the oldest religious society in the city. It was organized by Reverend William Royal in September, 1836, in the log house of Samuel Gregory, and numbered five members. The name was changed to Centennial Methodist Church in 1876 in recognition of the centennial of the United States. In 1883, the church building was torn down and replaced by a new one on the same site. An educational building was added in 1956. The present pastor is Rev. William O. Risinger. The parsonage is at 508 Vale Avenue North.



First Congregational Church, located at South Third, Walnut, and Kishwaukee Streets; now the home of a Masonic lodge



### A Group of Some Rockford Churches

1. WESTMINSTER PRESBYTERIAN

2. CENTENNIAL METHODIST

3. TRINITY LUTHERAN

4. FIRST CHURCH OF CHRIST

5. FIRST PRESBYTERIAN

6. SWEDISH TABERNACLE

7. CHRISTIAN UNION

8. GRACE METHODIST

New Englanders formed the First Congregational Church on May 5, 1837, with eight members. The original church edifice was a wooden frame structure on South Church Street near the corner of Green Street. In 1845, a brick structure was completed on the east side, near State and First Streets. In 1870, a much larger house of worship was built at the corner of Walnut and Third Streets. In 1917 the congregation was disbanded and most of the remaining members transferred to Second Congregational Church. The old building on Walnut Street is now a Masonic building.

The Baptists were the third denominational group to launch a religious society in the first four years of the town's existence. In the spring of 1838, sixteen pioneers banded together under the guidance of Rev. S. S. Whitman. Its first house of worship was located at the corner of West State and Winnebago Streets. In 1850, the congregation bought a corner site at North Church and Mulberry Streets, now 123 North Church Street. In 1919 the church was rebuilt at 518 North Court Street, and was again rebuilt in 1968. Rev. Harold Reemtsma is the pastor.

The Emmanuel Episcopal Parish was launched in 1849, under the leadership of the Rev. Dudley Chase. Previous to this time, Episcopalians in Rockford were supplied with occasional religious services by traveling missionaries. Rev. Father Loudebeck was the first missionary who performed stated Episcopal services in 1841. Reverend Mr. Pulford continued the work until 1849. Episcopalians built their first structure on North Church and North Street (now Park Avenue), adding to the original building on two occasions. The Reverend Charles Reighlen was called to the rectorship in 1852. In 1957 a new church was built on the corner of North Church and Park Avenue.

The United Unitarian and Universalist Church (so designated in 1867) was launched in 1841 as separate congregations. The Universalists met at the home of Daniel S. Haight, who was the first Universalist to settle in Rockford and also East Rockford's first resident (1835), on April 24, 1841. Thatcher Blake, one of the two founders of Rockford, brought Unitarianism to the West Rockford area, and the Unitarian Society came into being in February of



Drawing of the Second Congregational Church built in 1891 as it appeared before the fire occurred in 1893

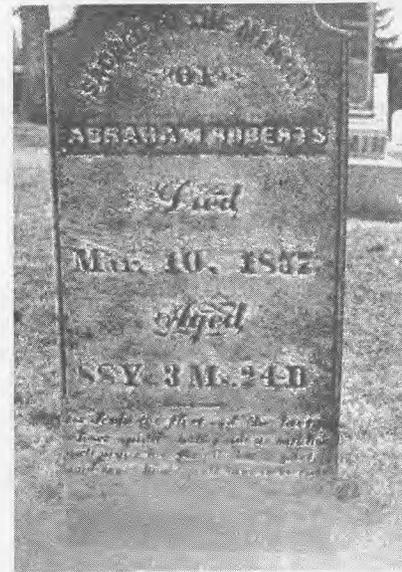
1841, with a published announcement that "Rev. Joseph Harrington, Chicago, will preach at the Court House next Sunday, February 27, at 10:30 o'clock." Due to the fact that the group of 17 fervent members were unable to find a minister in the midwest, they were dependent on missionaries. Visiting preachers conducted the services when Rev. Harrington was unable to travel from Chicago. In 1849, Rev. Herman Snow arrived from the east as the first full time minister. Previous to this time, there had been a consolidation of the Universalists and Unitarians.

The Second Congregational Church was launched in 1849 with forty-seven members. The ministers who served from November 14, 1849, throughout the next decade were the Revs. Lansing Porter, Joseph Emerson and Jeremiah Walton. The congregation built a spacious edifice of limestone at the corner of South Church and Chestnut Streets in 1855. "It boasts of a balcony on three sides, choir loft and belfry supporting a 3,000 pound bell. The church is one of the largest of this denomination in northern Illinois and will accommodate nearly 1,200 worshippers." (1879 History of Rockford). In 1891 land was purchased on the southwest corner of North Church and Park Avenue, and in 1892 the church was dedicated. It used the bell from the old church. In 1894 the new church burned and was rebuilt that same year. In 1949 a chapel, named for Dr. John Gordon, and a meeting hall, named for Ralph Emerson, were built. The present minister is the Rev. Robert H. Midgley.

(To be continued)

HERE SLEEP THE BRAVE  
By Mrs. Harold B. Hyde  
(Concluded from last issue)

Abraham Roberts is said to have been a private in the company of Captain James Conner. His official record from the Archives states he was paid for service in Henry K. Van Rensselaer's Regiment of New York Militia. Abraham was be-



Headstone of Abraham Roberts, Revolutionary War Soldier, buried at Twelve Mile Grove Cemetery

lieved to have come from Vermont to Ogdensburg, New York. He came to the area near Pecatonica with his daughter, Mrs. Reuben Wells. He outlived his son-in-law, dying in 1857. He was buried in Twelve Mile Grove Cemetery, located on Se-



Relatives of Abraham Roberts and Chester Wells

ward Road, south of U.S. Highway 20. For many years, Boy Scouts from Pecatonica have decorated this grave because the Pecatonica Grand Army of the Republic listed Abraham Roberts as a Revolutionary War soldier before that organization was finally disbanded as a post. In 1971, the Rockford Chapter DAR marked the graves of the two Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Twelve Mile Grove Cemetery with impressive ceremonies.



Descendants of Abraham Roberts and Chester Wells who attended DAR ceremonies marking graves of Revolutionary War soldiers

Chester Wells, a brother of Reuben Wells, whose wife was the daughter of Abraham Roberts, came to the area about or prior to 1840. He took up land just three miles away from his brother. Mrs. Henry Meyer of Pecatonica and her sister still own land in Seward Township that has been in



Stones of Chester Wells and his wife, Eliza, at Twelve Mile Grove Cemetery

the Wells family since the 1840s and the land title was signed by Zachary Taylor. The National Archives lists Chester Wells' service as in Belting's Regiment of Connecticut Militia, and he had the rank of Captain.

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