

Nuggets of History

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THE HOME OF CARL AND MARIA LUNDBERG

By Charlotte Klingstedt Stack

This story about a house must necessarily be also a story about the people who built it.

In 1859 a young woman, Maria Gustava Lundberg, aged nineteen, came to the United States from Sweden. Her destination was Rockford, Illinois, where she joined her husband, Carl Magnus Lundberg, who had journeyed to California to look for gold and had now returned to Rockford to settle and build the home of their dreams.

They built this home on a southwest corner, at what



is now 703 Kishwaukee Street, where it still stands after more than one hundred years. It is a large two-story red brick house with a wide railed porch across the front facing east and extending halfway along the north side.

Maria was strong and helped her husband, whom she called "Lundberg", with the work of building. He made a yoke for her to wear when she carried water from the Rock River nearly half a mile away. Pails were secured by hooks placed at the ends of ropes which were the correct length to allow her to bear part of the weight with her hands. She made many trips each day for water to mix the mortar for the bricks. Lundberg was an excellent wood craftsman, as shown by a beautiful wooden staircase and massive doors leading to the parlor. He also made some fine walnut furniture.

The Lundbergs had two sons, Albin Aurelius, Born in 1862, and Carl Edward, born in 1866.

This home was a destination for many Swedish immigrant boys. My grandfather, John R. Westring, was one of them. He was Maria's nephew, who arrived at their home in 1879,

where he made his home until he established one of his own, as did the others. The Lundberg sons played musical instruments. On summer evenings all the young men would sit on the front porch and sing to their accompaniment the popular songs for the day. This became not only a source of enjoyment but also an important lesson in the English language. More than one daughter was named for one of their favorites, "Sweet Evelina".

The Lundberg boys married young. Albin had two daughters: Carl had one son. But the beautiful Lundberg home held tragedy for the family. Carl Magnus, the husband and father, died first at age forty-nine, then the two sons each at age twenty-two, and at least one of their wives, all of consumption, the dreaded killer of the era. By 1889 all that remained of the Lundberg family were Maria and her little granddaughter, Alice Evelina. She lived in her home for thirty-six more years, sharing it for a time with more Swedish immigrants and later with her granddaughter's family, the Claus A. Pearsons.

The Lundberg sitting room had a large bay with windows facing north. Here on a tall pedestal stood a fern, its beautiful green fronds reaching down to the floor. As it grew, she shared its shoots of new growth with friends and relatives. Portraits of her family hung on the walls. The kitchen, far at the back of the big house, was large, as were all the rooms. Visiting children could follow this great lady to the door of her pantry and watch her take from a big stone crock a dark, rich delicious fruit cake, from which she cut slices for her visitors.

Maris Lundberg died a venerable woman in 1925 at age 84, and is survived this day by third, fourth and fifth generations, -- Carl A. Pearson, Evelyn Pearson Fish, and their children and grandchildren.

PHILANDER KNAPPEN, CHARLES LATIMER
AND THE ELECTIONS
By Billie Whitsitt
(Continued from last issue)

It is not known exactly when Charles Latimer came to town. In an early issue of Knappen's STAR, in October, there was an advertisement for Charles Latimer, attorney at law, and that is the first time his name was in print. Since he was a flaming Democrat, he carefully put no advertisements in Gray's paper, but regularly patronized the STAR.

In the October 22 issue, Knappen praised Charles Latimer for his excellent way of expressing himself with words, and on the same page there was a long and curious letter to the editor, signed C.L. It was a strange and in some ways humorous letter (though not meant to be), and in looking over Gray's paper of October 10, and tying the two issues together, it is not hard to more than assume that C.L. is Charles Latimer.

This incredibly long letter describes for perhaps a

third of its length, the persecution of the early Christians, but recalling that in spite of this persecution, and in spite of paganism, Christianity thrived because it was a great truth. Suddenly C.L.'s letter jumped into 19th century politics. Democracy and Christianity are put forth as similar, even to early persecution. Some people are drawn away from the "true church" due to fear or the threat of tyranny:

". . . and have not the same means that tried to seduce Americans from the principles of democracy to those of federalism? Offensive emblems are to be hoisted and used by one party with impunity, but the moment a retaliatory emblem is displayed by some frolicsome person or persons on the other side, not withstanding it had been condemned and disclaimed by the party as a body, they are deliberately charged with the utterance of falsehoods, and are threatened with the indignation of the assembled multitude, that is, I suppose, provided it could be sufficiently wrought on by the ferid eloquence of the orator who thought proper to deny solemn asseverations of (leaving out the writer) twenty-one members of the democratic party, probably each bearing a character as respectable, and each having a reputation for veracity as dear to them at least as the orator himself, but this is not all, as soon as I asked as a simple act of justice from the author of the libel a retraction of the charge which it was a duty incumbent upon me to characterize as false this very attempt to establish before the world is regarded as an offense to be atoned for only with my blood; and I am pursued to my abode by a minister of death, armed with a loaded pistol, to execute the sentence that the crime of asking justice from a person, who wantonly injured me, had incurred upon my head." (From THE ROCKFORD STAR, Saturday, October 22, 1840) This letter was more than flowery and oblique; it was fuzzy, appearing to be written off the top of the writer's head in a fit of extreme excitement. Yet on that same page Knappen praised Latimer's ability to express himself well. Did he honestly think so, or was he giving moral support to a fellow party member, just at election time when fellow party members were extra important?

Latimer's reference to the retaliatory action by "some frolicsome person or persons" would have been forever a mystery if Gray's paper had not been part of the scene. It is still not completely clear, only clearer. In many communities in 1840 the Whigs, besides having a log cabin as Harrison's symbol, often put up what they called a liberty pole. The Rockford Whigs had raised such a pole and on a particular day had planned a rally. When they arrived at the log cabin and the liberty pole early that morning, the loco-foco's, as Gray called the Democrats, had arrived earlier, and hoisted a red petticoat, its presence referring to some unpleasant past of Harrison's.

In the ROCK RIVER EXPRESS of October 10, 1840, Gray had put his own delighted headline above a letter-to-the-editor:

"You can't say that I did it!

"WE, the undersigned, JEFFERSONIAN DEMOCRATS, having witnessed the disgraceful exhibition which is presented this morning from the top of the LIBERTY POLE, take this opportunity of signifying our unqualified disapprobation of this shameful outrage upon Public Decency, and this WANTON and GROSS INSULT and AFFRONT aimed at a large body of our fellow-citizens who disagree with us in political opinion.

"We view that man is the worst enemy of Democracy, who would carry on the WARFARE against the party he is opposed to, in any other manner than with the LEGITIMATE WEAPONS of ARGUMENT and REASON. We REPUDIATE the act as UNWORTHY of the cause that is our PRIDE and our HONOR to support; relying as we do upon the INTELLIGENCE and VIRTUE of the people, and not on the parade of OFFENSIVE BADGES and EMBLEMS to ensure success to the TRUE SONS OF DEMOCRACY.

CHARLES LATIMER
JAMES MITCHELL
D. S. HAIGHT
JOHN T. SHALES
D. HOWELL, and 16 others"

If Charles Latimer wrote this letter, it was in a more steady moment than the one he wrote for Knappen's paper a few days later and referred to previously. Whether the letter above is a true expression of the facts can not be said, but Gray's response may have been one of the factors in helping to trigger the strange, obscure letter by Latimer. Gray responded in this way:

"Now, gentlemen, we have tell your story, and we must be permitted to tell ours. It is well known in this community that many of you, if not all, chuckled over the suspended petticoat in the morning--that one, if not more of the prominent men of your party, exclaimed to his friends upon getting out of bed at break of day--'Look, ye see what WE have got upon the LIBERTY POLE!' It was made a matter of BOAST with you, that you had raised the HARRISON BANNER, until the RECOIL came upon you. The following words being placed upon the pole, under the 'offensive emblem' in explanation of the petticoat operation of your party, brought you to your senses, and caused your knees to tremble like unto Belshazzar's:

*LOGO BANNER

'Hoisted by the LOCOFOCOS of Rockford, on the Anniversary of the Battle of the Thames!'

"Let the people bear in mind that it has been pretty correctly ascertained that the petticoat which was suspended upon the Liberty Pole, on Wednesday morning last came from the house of one of the individuals whose signature appears to the above document. Let the people know that the Locos were all in high glee."

Charles Latimer's excitable nature is clearly apparent in his written words. He revealed the same nature in his actions the following summer, 1841, and again at the time of his death in 1844.

Knappen carried a poor impression of the Whigs' methods at election time. He may have been right; historical

reports of bitter contest of 1840 show the Whigs (or Federalists) to be unusually gifted at "fighting dirty." Knappen wrote:

"Fellow-citizens, resist any efforts of the Federalists to take home the poll-books before the votes are counted.

"Look out for hired bullies who will be stationed about the polls.

"The best way (to vote) is to walk square up to the judges and say, 'I VOTE THE VAN BUREN ELECTORAL TICKET!' They are bound to record your vote." (From the ROCKFORD STAR, Thursday, October 29, 1840.)

There was also the rumor from Chicago, and duly reported by Knappen, that the Whigs were bringing down men from the Territory of Wisconsin to vote. It appeared necessary to get out every Democratic vote in the county if such tactics were to be fought. Therefore, Knappen suggested that if it was noticed that someone had not come to vote, another should go find him; and if he was behind in his seeding, help him so he could get to the polls.

At last the election was over. Communication being what it was in 1840, the returns were slow in coming in. Knappen printed rumors from many states as often as he printed the final results. All of this tended to keep feelings in a high state weeks after the event of voting was over. In one issue Knappen said, "Election returns come in slow, and we have no desire to receive them faster unless they are more favorable." (From the ROCKFORD STAR, Saturday, November 14, 1840.)

When the fatal news arrived, Knappen's Van Buren had been replaced by Gray's Harrison. Winnebago County had gone for Harrison with a vote of 768 to 321. Van Buren carried eight states which was a minor victory for Knappen because the Whigs had loudly declared he would not even carry six. Previous to the election Knappen, in quoting news stories from other parts, had made a great point of this, and it may have been his only comfort afterwards. Illinois was one of the eight, but the vote was close -- 47,476 for Van Buren to 45,537 for Harrison.

John Thurston, the "devil" in the STAR office remembered a little drama of those post-election days:

"The facilities for communication were so meagre in 1840, that the official vote of this State in the Harrison campaign, was not known until late in December. I infer the vote was intentionally kept back by the Democratic officials at Springfield. A messenger from the capital with the official vote of the State, passed through Rockford some ten days in advance of its publication in the Chicago papers, communicating the news to the prominent men of the party in each village for betting purposes, . . . Haight gave me the figures the same day he received them, and I carried them to my father at Harlem. Whatever may now be thought of the proceeding, the old gentlemen did 'bet on a sure thing;' my own share of the winnings being a pair of coarse boots." (From Thurston's REMINISCENCES, 1891, p. 94)

The opposition was not unmindful of Haight's wheelings

and dealings. In one issue of the ROCK RIVER EXPRESS Gray wrote in his sarcastic manner:

"To those who have made bets on the result of the election in this State, with certain GENTLEMEN who left this place last week with the official Returns in pockets; we would say--pay not at all. The men who went into Wisconsin to make Wagers on a CERTAINTY cannot be indicted for horse-stealing." (From ROCK RIVER EXPRESS, December 4, 1840)

Knappen was characteristically silent. Here it is interesting to speculate on his knowledge and feelings. Was he really ignorant of what Haight had done? Or did he choose to close his eyes to this blatant dishonesty? Knappen's newspaper articles show him to be a deeply religious man as dogma goes, and a temperate man as alcohol goes, but these two traits do not make a man necessarily honest. It could be that Haight, knowing Knappen's personality did not even approach him for a bet that would let him in on a "sure thing." Even so, it is impossible to believe that Knappen had not at least heard that Haight had wilfully cheated people out of money bet on election results. If he did know, he chose to keep quiet; after all Daniel Haight was part owner of the type, and Knappen was merely a tenant.

In late winter two great parties were held in the growing town: the Harrison Ball in February to honor the new President, and the Van Buren Ball in March to honor the outgoing President. People of both political parties, or neither, came from all parts of the counties and even from outside the county, to attend both balls, and the wounds of the pre-election strife were apparently healed. On the invitation to the Van Buren Ball, Daniel Haight's and Charles Latimer's names were among those heading the list of sponsors.

EARLY IMMIGRATION---1838-1910

By W. Ashton Johnson

The first settlers from a foreign clime to settle in Winnebago County came from the land of the heather and thistle, in 1836.

The John Greenlees, husband and wife together with young kinfolk, came to America from Argyleshire, Scotland, in 1836, surviving a tempestuous crossing, consuming 41 days. Desiring to settle inland, the family purchased a team and covered wagon and proceeded overland to Ottawa, Illinois. After a month or two John Greenlee decided to move north to the Rock River Valley, where he had heard more fertile land afforded good chances to farm successfully. In September the wagon train passed through Rockford, traveling northeast 12 miles. Here they staked a claim and founded the town of Argyle.

The original Greenlee homestead acreage was just within the eastern boundary of Winnebago county. Later the "Mile Strip" controversy between Winnebago and Boone counties was settled by residents of the disputed territory in favor of

the latter, 51 to 44. This action brought the Greenlee holdings very close to the new county line.

Hugh Reid, who had also migrated from New York to Ottawa, followed the Greenlees north in 1838. The following year brought several new families to the Scotch settlement, among them being: George Picken, Robert Howie, Andrew Griffin, Alex McDonald, William Ferguson, and James Picken Sr.

The presidential election of 1840 found the families of John Andrews, Alex Reid, Robert Armour, and Samuel Howie as new arrivals. More immigrants from Scotland arrived in 1841; The Gavin and David Ralstons, William Harveys, John McEachrans, and John Picken. Later in the "Forties" came David Smith, James Montgomery, David C. Ralston, Peter Greenlee, William Ralston, John Caldwell, James and Alex Reid, Mrs. A. McNair, Peter Ralston, Charles Picken, Alex Ralston, and Lionel Henderson.

By 1844 there were 30 families in the Argyle Settlement, many of whom would wear the kilts of their clan on Scottish ceremonial observances.

Until the influx of the first Swedish immigrants, Rockford's early development industrially was attributed to the mechanical "know how" of hardy New Englanders and a scattering of pioneers traveling overland from the southeastern states.

In June of 1852 the first group of Scandinavians arrived here by train and stage from Chicago, following a stormy 47-day crossing of the Atlantic. These pioneers who had yielded to legends that the United States was a land of plenty, included Sven August Johnson, Eva Christine Peterson and her sister, Anna Helen, Lars J. Halleen, his wife Catharina and their children, and a young man of mechanical skill, John Nelson, besides a dozen others. Records of this party of pioneer immigrants were lost during the cholera epidemic of 1855.

Young Nelson, who was to revolutionize the knitting



Home of John Nelson at 309 South First Street

industry in 1875-78 by inventing a machine to knit men's socks, was one of three energetic Swedes who helped greatly in organizing the First Evangelical Church in 1854. With Carl J. Carlsson and Isak Peterson, Nelson and his colleagues each borrowed \$108 with which to purchase a lot for the church site. Not content to finance the real estate parcel, these men assessed the contractors to erect the edifice at the corner of N. First and Market St. during the following year.

It is interesting to note that Rockford was visited for the first time by a former president in 1879, when General Ulysses S. Grant paid a call on the Nelsons and W. W. Burson and inspected the knitting factory. Inventor Nelson and his partner had brought national fame to their home town. John Nelson died in 1883 at the age of 53 before he had time to reap benefits from his inventions. His sons, Alfred and J. Franklin, possessed inventive skills and developed several patented improvements of their father's automatic knitter. The former died at the age of 30 but his younger brother later perfected a knitter that would produce ribbed stockings for several years, benefitting financially.

Sven August Johnson arrived in this country with a rating of "master tailor" earned in his native West Gothland home town. He spent several years working for others. At the time he acquired his citizenship papers in 1858 he and John Erlander established a tailoring and clothing store on East State Street. It was located "one door west of the Third National Bank", their business card announced. On election day, 1860, Johnson, in company with 47 other new citizens from Scandinavia, marched to the polls and cast their votes for Abraham Lincoln.

Besides his interest in a growing business, S. A. Johnson was a charter member of the First Lutheran Church as treasurer of the Church's Savings bank. This so-called bank was a forerunner of a saving and loan association, funds being saved by members for the purchase of homes. When the Swedish Building and Loan Association was launched in 1889, P. A. Peterson, Johnson, A. P. Floberg, James Sundquist, Robert C. Lind, L. M. Noling, Andrew J. Anderson and August Lind were named directors. Johnson served as treasurer. As years went on, the Johnson interests were more diversified. Besides being a church treasurer for 30 years, he served the building and loan association; was president of the Central Furniture Company from 1879 until his death in 1921; was an organizer and trustee of the Scandinavian Cemetery; held stock in the Third National Bank, Star Furniture Company and the Royal Sewing Machine Company.

(Concluded in next issue)

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