

Nuggets of History

Volume 12

November-December, 1975

Number 6

BICENTENNIAL GENEALOGY MEETING COMPLETE SUCCESS

By Hazel A. Kluck

When you receive a WANTED poster in the mail, it's time to sit up and take notice -- "WANTED: DEAD OR ALIVE: ANCESTORS -- Were your ancestors kings, pirates...?" This question, passed along by letter and word of mouth, aroused much interest in the meeting held Monday evening, October 20, 1975, in the Local History Room of the main library.

Robert J. Tarte, A.G., President of the Massachusetts Society of Genealogists, Librarian of the Boston Branch Genealogical Library, expert on New England genealogy, and nationally known speaker and author, on an extensive tour of the country, presented a most interesting program on "Beginning Genealogy" and "New England Record Sources". Using an overhead projector and transparencies of book pages to augment a good speaking voice, Mr. Tarte kept eighty genealogists and would-be genealogists fascinated by his presentation, which left everyone with a better understanding of doing genealogical research. In his closing comments, Mr. Tarte stressed the necessity of a renewal of the family unit, along with proper mutual respect between family members and by young people for one another and for their elders. The closing few minutes of the evening's program were spent asking Mr. Tarte questions which he most graciously answered. Mr. Tarte received a standing ovation at the close of the program.

How did Rockford happen to be so fortunate as to have such a program given here? The original letter came to the Freeport Genealogy Group, of which Hazel Kluck is past president. Consulting their president, Gary Price, the decision was made to accept Mr. Tarte's offer of a free program and to bring the meeting to Rockford so that it would be available to more people. The Rockford Historical Society agreed to co-sponsor the program. Inasmuch as the program was suggested as a Bicentennial Project, the Winnebago County Bicentennial Commission was approached. We received their whole-hearted approval as an "Official Bicentennial Project" and the assistance of William Garson, their publicity chairman.

Area historical and genealogical societies were contacted. We received radio and television cooperation. The Rockford Public Library also gave their full cooperation. Ruth Lunde, head of the Local History and Genealogy Department, was most helpful with planning ideas; and the maintenance man carted chairs and more chairs, until every unused chair on third floor found its way into the Local History Room; extension cords, boxes of books, etc., also arrived, thanks to him.

While not everyone in attendance signed the registra-

tion sheets and answered our questions, they came from a roughly triangular area outlined by Freeport, Beloit, and the Dekalb-Sycamore area. Thirty-three persons indicated interest in having a genealogy group in Rockford. A total of thirty-five historical, genealogical, and patriotic societies were represented. The historical societies represented were Rockford, Stephenson County, Ogle County, Boone County, Kentucky, Iowa, Swedish (Rockford), Milton (Wisconsin), Pennsylvania Dutch Folk Culture, Friends of the Museum (Rockford), American College of Heraldry, Gruner County (Pennsylvania), Massachusetts, Indiana, Chicago, Illinois, Beloit (Wisconsin).

Genealogy is now considered third only to stamp collecting and coin collecting as a hobby according to an article in the November FAMILY CIRCLE magazine. This meeting certainly proved there is plenty of interest in this area. If you didn't get there to hear Mr. Tarte, but are interested in genealogy, please contact Hazel Kluck, telephone number 963-9780.

You will be hearing more about genealogy in Rockford soon.

SERVICE AND INSPIRATION FOR THE COMMUNITY

By Wendy Tisdale

(Written in 1967 when the author was a student at Washington Junior High School)

New Zion Missionary Baptist Church is organized to serve the community. On July 8, 1924, this church was founded under the direction of Rev. T. P. McGee and the location was 504 Island Avenue. There were eight members present and they were as follows: Rev. T. P. McGee, Mrs. Mary McGee, Mr. Samuel Peoples, Mr. O. C. Davis, Mrs. Roxana Richardson, Mrs. Thomas Cochran, and Mrs. and Mrs. Branch.

In the year of 1925, the congregation purchased a place at 922 Morgan Street. The first official board members were Mr. J. B. James, Robert Hargrove, Mose Myrick, Walter Smith, and George Winslow. All are now deceased except Mr. Walter Smith.

The present (1967) members of the board are Mr. Anthony Roebuck, Clarence Brown, William Pryor, L. D. Hinton, Willie Turner, Henry McClain, Samuel Alexander, and Landry Jones.

In March of 1958, Rev. McGee became quite ill, and in February of 1959 his last sermon was preached. On April 8, 1959, at 9:10 A.M. Reverend Thomas Philip McGee passed away. He had been a source of great inspiration, and the loss was felt by all.

The members of New Zion sought for a new pastor, and January 8, 1960, Rev. Clayborn Salter was invited to fill the pulpit. Until he accepted, Rev. Lumus Gulley was the pastor, from February 28 to May 1, 1960.

In a fatal accident on November 6, 1960, Rev. Lumus Gulley departed from this earth. Everyone appreciated the great service he had rendered in holding the church together. On May 1, 1960, Rev. Clayborn Salter became New Zion's full-time pastor and is now serving in that capacity.

The church at 922 Morgan Street was becoming too small for the growing membership. Brother L. D. Hinton sighted a place at 604 Wall Street, which was the Montague House. It was purchased from the Rockford Womens Club to be changed from a social center to a church. On October 21, 1960, everything was settled and we marched from 922 Morgan to 604 Wall Street, on November 24, 1960, Thanksgiving Day, led by Rev. Salter. The dedication message for New Zion Missionary Baptist Church was given by Rev. Rudolph Shultz, from Second Baptist Church, Dixon, Illinois.

Since the church has been in this location, many new auxiliaries have been started, for instance, the Laymen League, Youth Department, Willing Workers, and Sunshine Band. The church membership is tripled, and a membership dinner is held at the end of each year. All of the people who joined that year enter free, and old members are invited to join in an evening of fellowship. People find friends and stimulating activities.

In 1964, a remodeling program was started and put into action. The Sanctuary has been completely remodeled. There is an elevated baptistry and some hope to install a mirror. The choir loft is new, as is the balcony. The pews have comfortable blue cushions. The seating capacity is 425. Carpets are of red plush. Folding doors are used for Sunday School facilities, and there is a completely remodeled kitchen. The downstairs is tiled and the walls are paneled. We hope to have a lighted cross on a steeple. The cross may be twenty feet high.

Many dramas have been prepared and performed under the direction of the pastor's wife, Mrs. Laura Salter. Mrs. Salter was educated at the National Trade and Professional School for Women and Girls in Washington, D.C. She is very interested in civic and community affairs.

Our pastor, Rev. Clayborn Salter, received his religious education at the Chicago Baptist Institute and Moody Bible Institute, both in Chicago, Illinois. He had been a minister in Dixon, Illinois, at the Second Baptist Church and at St. Paul Baptist in Freeport, Illinois. He has made many improvements and is interested in the welfare of the people as well as civic, cultural, and community happenings.

We have high hopes for the future. New Zion Church will render service to the community as well as to its own members.

(The preceding article was written by Miss Tisdale when she was a student of Associate Editor Hazel Hyde, and was presented to NUGGETS OF HISTORY by Mrs. Hyde.)

EARLY IMMIGRATION---1838-1910

By W. Ashton Johnson
(Concluded from last issue)

About ten years following the change in name of our town from Midway to Rockford, the first group of Irish came here from the east.

Previous to 1834, there had been an influx of Irish immigrants who had traveled the long route from New York and Boston to Galena. Reports of good wages in the lead mine district of northern Illinois had trickled east, with the result that two score of good folk from the Emerald Isle located in Jo Daviess county. At the time the entire area of Winnebago county, as well as that of Stephenson, Boone, DeKalb and McHenry were in the afore-said district.

In 1850, the Rt. Rev. J. A. Van de Velde, Bishop of the Chicago diocese of the Catholic church, visited in Rockford, while enroute to Galena by stage. The Bishop made inquiry as to how many Catholics resided in Rockford, over a breakfast at the Rockford House, the stop of an hour or two being made in order to rest the horses. Arriving at Galena, where he was to install a parish, Bishop Van de Velde wrote back to Chicago his recommendations that Rockford would be "fertile ground" in which to start a Catholic society.

Acting on the recommendations, a Fr. John A. Henston was ordered here in 1851. He divided his time between Pecatonica, Belvidere and Rockford. Two years later the loyal band of Irishmen raised monies with which to build a modest house of worship, the St. James Roman Catholic church, on the site of the present pro-cathedral of that name.

John Schmauss was one of a dozen German immigrants who came to Rockford from Germany in 1850. With him were his brothers, Henry, Joseph, and Leonard.

During the decade preceding the Civil War, this small group entered schools or absorbed lessons in English from private teachers while pursuing their respective duties in the business world. The Schmauss boys were sons of a Bavarian butcher. John was married in 1866 to Anna Froelich, who had been brought to this country by relatives as a girl of 15 years. The Neumeisters, August and Anton, the Schlenks, Minzingers, Schmelings, and Saubers are names of German pioneers who became identified with several business categories in the Rockford of 75 to 100 years ago. Wagon-making, wholesale and retail meat processing, confectionery, farming, frame and fixture manufacturing were pursued by these thrifty settlers.

A good portion of the German colony were fervent Lutherans, while a few accepted the Catholic faith. It was not until 1876 that a Lutheran church service was conducted in the German tongue by an ordained pastor. Previous to this, laymen led services on the Sabbath at various homes. Pastor A. Richman, Elgin, conducted several services in various halls, as did the Rev. S. Steinrauf and Baumgartner. Pastor C. Johannes became the first full-time minister.

In 1888, a division of belief arose in the Lutheran congregation, a portion of them withdrawing and forming St.

Paul's Evangelical Lutheran church. Those who remained in the original band "continued to develop a social organization designed to propagation of German cultural ideas". In the Eighties several families joined the Germania Gesang here in the second oldest social organization in the city. Launched in 1866 with 25 members, this society has lived through the years. During World War I its corporate name was changed to the "Pioneer Society". Animosity directed against any evidence of Teutonic names or customs caused the membership to adopt the new title. When the hysteria



had subsided, the name of Germania Hall again adorned the club's spacious home on South Madison Street.

Although the greater portion of Rockford settlers were of New England ancestry and possessed ancestors in the British Isles, a few migrated here direct from England. John H. Camlin, who amassed a fortune in downtown real estate in the early years of the century, came here in 1883. Robert and Frank Pearce, brothers, arrived in Rockford on successive years, 1884 and 1885. They were associated with the building and construction business for many years. Their firm, originally Pearce Brothers, is now (1965) operated by a son-in-law and daughter of the Frank Pearces, Mr. and Mrs. Merrill Butler. The firm name is the Pearce-Butler Company.

Arthur Eastwood, S. Valentine Saxby, and Sydney Kilburn added their names to the English settlement about the turn of the century. Saxby, who became identified with the L. A. Weyburn Co., was an unusual mimic of English music hall stars and either acted, or directed, several home talent productions, produced as charity benefits.

Then came the Italians. Giacomo Maffioli, Jack to his many friends in his adopted city, arrived in Rockford as

the first Italian immigrant in 1887, less than 10 years after leaving his native Milano, Italy, with his bride. While his wife and son were residing in Chicago, young Maffioli assumed a construction superintendent's job for the Chicago and Northwestern railroad. The job was supervision of laying new tracks from Chicago to Freeport. When the crew reached Cherry Valley, Maffioli asked for a 5-cent-an-hour raise for his crew. It was refused and the engineer quit his job and walked to Rockford. His first job in the Forest City was remodeling the Schmauss Co., on Market at 314 E. State Street, and building a slaughter house at the rear. After sending for his family, he assisted in bringing his three brothers here from Italy. As a building contractor, Giacamo Maffioli built many homes in the newly platted Highland district and suggested the name Rome Avenue when he erected his own home there. Rockford's first government-owned Postoffice building at South Main and Green was a product of his building knowledge. The present structure is on the same site as was the old Madison sandstone building, razed after World War I.

Other early immigrants from Italy included Joseph A. and Peter Bruneni, Joseph and Alexander Marelli and their other brothers; Joseph Scandrolis, Mark A. Martegani --- these were the pioneer immigrants from the top and the boot of Italy. Many of these - the Scandrolis, Marellis and Marteganos entered the building trades and have left lasting evidences of their craft in business sections.

Mark Martegano, who lived to be 100, earned the honor of being the oldest member of the bricklaying trade in the United States. He moved to Rockford in 1894, after residing in South America following immigration from Italy in the 'Eighties.

Sixty-odd years ago at the turn of the century, Rockford greeted its first immigrants from Greece. Of the pioneer, suntanned Hellenic sons and daughters, there were three or four who entered local business life without delay. These included James Panagakis, Nick Kutzukos, Peter Lambros and his sister, George Panagakis, and Miltiades (Mike) Tremulis. Then came George Hondros, Sam Chakeris, Sam Stavros, and the Kostantacos brothers. Most of them became members of St. Constantine Greek Orthodox Church. In the early 1920s a chapter of AHEPA was organized here as a cultural and social fraternity. The Rockford lodge played host to the Illinois district AHEPA chapters several years ago.

From the Balkan States came a scattering of freedom-loving patriots who had felt the oppression of tyrannical governments in Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, Rumania, Poland, Estonia, Latvia and Poland. From 1910 to 1920 immigration laws were modified. Many who came to these shores settled in states with a rolling terrain similar to the lands bordering on the Carpathain mountains. Wisconsin was the favored state for settlement but a score of families became citizens of Rockford until after the first World War.

GO IT WHILE YOU'RE YOUNG!

By Hazel M. Hyde

"The cold winter of 1842-43 was the most remarkable in the severity and long continuance of cold, as well as the great amount of snowfall, that has ever transpired since the first settlement of the county," wrote John H. Thurston in "Reminiscences". He continued, "Among my memorandum of 'Early Days', I find a record in letters and figures as follows: 'the river froze over November 19, 1842' which I assume to be correct, although my impressions are it was earlier." Writing of "Early Days in Rockford, Illinois," - he continued to describe the weather, the snow and ice on Rock River.

John Thurston recollected, "The river closed in one night during a furious snow storm, the ferry boat running freely previous to that." Some old postcards of a few years later show how solidly Rock River froze in earlier days. Skating parties on the river were a common diversion. Even sleighs and cutters could travel on the river ice drawn by fleet horses, and usually accompanied by the jingle of bells.

Thurston continued to describe the conditions. He wrote, "The earth was not frozen at the time, and remained in that condition in the thickets and beside the fences where the snow banked up to the top rails, until the first day of April, 1843; on that day in the woods between Rockford and Belvidere it was two feet on the level. The cold was intense."

John Thurston, whose observations were printed in 1891, began taking note of his surroundings when he was a boy of thirteen years of age. He had arrived from Troy, New York, in this frontier settlement and was excited by all the new experiences.

Thinking back, he wrote more about that cold winter. He recalled, "On the prairie where there was a fence on both sides of the road, it filled full. On the open prairie, the snow in the road was from four to six feet deep. As each passing team broke the crust, the wind filled up the track, elevating it above the surrounding surface so as to make it impossible for teams to pass without turning over. There was a January thaw of sufficient duration to carry off nearly all the snow on the prairie, with the exception of that in the roads and lying along the fences, when it again froze, and a fall of snow came equal to the first storm."

John revealed himself as a lively, high-spirited boy who loved fun. It was a time when youth employed imagination and their own efforts in gaining entertainment. There was a spirit of joy in some of the simple pleasures of the age.

"To the youngsters of that winter," John Thurston remarked, "it was a season of supreme enjoyment. To myself personally, it was glorious. While I write, memory carries me back, and I see a young fellow roaming over the snow,

and stretching away through a trackless waste came visions of Paradise. Since then I've often been sleighing with a swell-box cutter, luxurious robes and silver bells, but there has never been music so sweet as that from the 'Belle of the Jumper.'"

"The public balls of that day were as innocent and void of immorality as any of the select gatherings of modern days," he wrote. "We all had friends and acquaintances in Beloit, Belvidere, Newburg, and Freeport, and often visited those towns. Distance was not considered if the party wanted to go. The girls had one dress carefully treasured for special occasions, and the boys one suit, looked after with solicitude. There was always a girl with a needle and skilled hands to darn or patch it as might be required. The singing and spelling schools, and particularly the candy pulls, quilting and fandangos in the log cabins, have never since been equalled in genuine, unalloyed fun and happiness. 'Go it while you're young, when you get old you can't.'"

Good times! Fun Times! A brisk winter evening was the perfect weather for a taffy pull. The girls in the party would measure out the ingredients. A popular recipe follows:

Vinegar Taffy

For each pull

1 cup cane sugar

1 or 2 tablespoons vinegar and enough water to moisten

a pinch of salt

¼ teaspoon cream of tartar

Combine ingredients in pan and bring to a boil. Do not stir after mixture starts to boil, and if crystals form on side of pan, wipe them off with a damp cloth wrapped around a fork. Boil to the brittle boil stage or until it spins a 12-inch thread. Do not stir. Pour into a greased pan to cool until you can start pulling it.

The boys watched and teased as the ingredients were put into a pot and set to boiling. They may have stoked the kitchen cookstove with wood earlier. Now they stood around as one of the more experienced taffy makers dipped a spoon in now and then until a drop would spin a twelve-inch thread. It seemed to take an eternity and some would drift away to sing or to plan a party game. A hum of voices and shrill laughter came from the next room.

The patient watchers would dip the spoon into the mixture, lifting it high above the pan and let it drizzle back in. A little doubt as to whether it might ever make a thread could show on some faces.

(Concluded in next issue)

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published bi-monthly by the Rockford Historical Society. Editor: R.H. Borden; Associate Editor: Hazel Hyde; Assistant Editor: Timothy Borden; President: Clement V. Burns; Membership Chairman: Stuart K. Golding; Typist: Mrs. Warren Burlend. Address correspondence to Hazel A. Kluck, Secretary, 1614 Huffman Boulevard 61103.