

## NUGGETS of HISTORY

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### SKANDIA FURNITURE COMPANY IN BUSINESS FOR 51 YEARS

In May, 1975, a letter was received by the Rockford Chamber of Commerce from Mrs. Clarence Bellmer of Petoskey, Michigan. The letter was referred by the Chamber to the Rockford Historical Society. Mrs. Bellmer enclosed a picture of her combination bookcase and desk, which she said

had been manufactured by the Skandia Furniture Company of Rockford. In addition to the Skandia name on the back, there also appeared the names of the cabinetmakers who had done the work of building it. Most of the names were no longer clear enough to read, but she was able to make out the name of C. Swemberg. This turned out to be Charles G. Swemberg, a 30-year employee at Skandia who resided at 709 North Second Street; Swemberg was a brother of Mrs. Belle Storm, long-time member of First Lutheran Church who died in 1969 at the age of 99. Another sister, Hannah E. Swemberg, worked in the office at Skandia Furniture for about thirty years.

Mrs. Bellmer's Desk



About three months after the arrival of Mrs. Bellmer's photograph of her desk, a letter was received by the Rockford Historical Society from Mrs. Carol K. Ackerman of Arlington Heights, Illinois. She had in her possession an 1894 catalog of the Skandia Furniture Company, and wondered if we would like to have it. She had received the catalog from Mrs. Helen Schmid of Orono, Ontario.

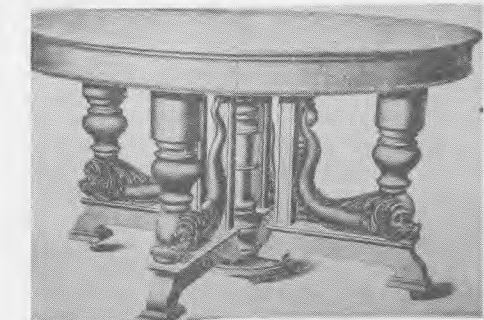
Mrs. Schmid is co-author of a history of the village of Orono and the township of Clarke in which Orono is located. It was during the ten years that she was doing the research for her book that she found the Skandia catalog among the possessions of a man named John Waddell, who had been a furniture manufacturer in Orono. Mrs. Schmid found no correspondence from the Skandia Company, so she theorizes that Mr. Waddell had probably obtained the catalog, possibly at a furniture exposition, in order to get ideas for his own factory.

Illustrated in the catalog are twelve combination bookcase-desks of the general type that Mrs. Bellmer owned, and three more are shown in an additional folder tucked inside. The wholesale prices ranged from \$14 for the plainest type to \$29 for the most ornate; these prices were for

desks with one set of bookshelves attached. For people with twice as many books, there was a double combination with two sets of shelves, one on each side of the desk; the wholesale price for this was \$45. The specific design of Mrs. Bellmer's desk, which she recently sold to an antique dealer for \$75, is not found in this catalog; it was probably produced later. These combination desk-bookcases were sometimes called "parlor cabinets".

Other items of furniture listed in Mrs. Schmid's catalog were hall trees, pillar extension tables, ladies' desks, china closets, cylinder desk-bookcases, cylinder desks, parlor desks, and library cases. Most were made of oak, but a few items could be had in mahogany, usually at a cost of from four to seven dollars more, and the cylinder desks and cylinder desk-bookcases could be had in

walnut for an additional cost of 50 cents.



Pillar Extension Table made of quartersawed oak; size of top not extended 52 inches in diameter; if made to extend to 10 feet, price was \$28 wholesale but increased to \$30 if it could extend to 14 feet.

The Skandia Furniture Company, 1202 North Second Street, was organized in February, 1889. Its first officers were Horace Brown, president; Charles Bjorklund, vice-president; and C. H. Woolsey, secretary-treasurer. However, before the year was over, Thomas J. Derwent had replaced Brown as president. Things apparently did not go smoothly at first. In January, 1890, Derwent resigned the presidency and from the board of directors, and Brown, who was still on the board, resigned from that. The other early directors were Leonard Schmauss, John Connor, Charles J. Jones, Gust Flodell, Charles Bjorklund, and Carl J. Swenson.

At the stockholders' meeting of February 3, 1890, Derwent, Brown, Schmauss, Connor, and Jones were replaced

Double Combination Bookcase

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August P. Floberg, 711 Seminary Street, an early vice president and member of the board of directors of Skandia Furniture Company; for many years vice president of Manufacturers National Bank

on the board by August P. Floberg, Frank P. Hogland, Bradford A. Knight, Robert Bauch, and Gust Anderson. At the first meeting of the new directors later that day, Knight was selected as the new president, Bjorklund was replaced by Floberg as vice president, and Will A. Brolin replaced Woolsey as secretary-treasurer. There apparently had been dissatisfaction among both the stockholders and directors because Woolsey, who had a yearly salary of \$1,500 as secretary-treasurer, had employed a bookkeeper to help him.

At the same meeting of the directors on February 3,



Carl J. Swenson, 1326 Cooper Avenue, a native of Wassby, Elfsborgs Lan, Sweden; came to Rockford in 1880; one of the organizers of Skandia Furniture Company and its first superintendent; served as vice president for about twenty-eight years; treasurer of Swedish Building and Loan Association for seven years preceding his death in 1936

Carl J. Swenson was re-elected superintendent. Mr. Swenson had previously been superintendent at the Forest City Furniture Company and Rockford Co-operative Furniture Company. The foreman of the finishing department and one of the first stockholders was John A. Borden, grandfather of the editor of NUGGETS OF HISTORY.

By 1892 Skandia had done what so many other Rockford



John A. Borden, who made his home at 1303 Cosper Avenue. The paternal grandfather of the editor, Borden was from Bordsjö Parish near Askeryd, Småland, Sweden. One of the original stockholders of Skandia Furniture Company, he was the finishing foreman of the firm for many years.

furniture factories did when they were in trouble -- elected Pehr August Peterson as president. Brolin continued as secretary-treasurer, but Gust Flozell replaced Floberg as vice president. When the Panic of 1893 hit several of the companies in which Peterson was involved, the "furniture king" was kept busy keeping most of them from bankruptcy, so the presidency of Skandia was turned over to Frank G. Hogland. Superintendent Swenson was then given the additional responsibilities of vice president, which office he held, with only short interruptions, almost continually through 1926. For some reason Brolin was also replaced at that time; whether or not it was by his own request is not now known. For a few years the offices of secretary and treasurer were separate, held by two different men. Brolin returned as secretary in 1900 but C.T. Boswell continued as treasurer. In 1903 Brolin again became secretary-treasurer, and continued in that position until 1921.

P.A. Peterson returned as president of Skandia Furniture in 1900, and continued until his death; F. E. Darrow became vice president, C.T. Boswell treasurer, and Brolin secretary. Oscar E. Landstrom became president late in 1927 upon the death of Peterson. In 1921 Brolin was succeeded as secretary-treasurer by Alfred A. Carlson, who remained in that capacity for the next twenty years. In 1935



Pehr August Peterson, president of Skandia Furniture Company for about 27 years. Peterson was also president of many other Rockford Firms. His home at 1313 East State is now Jenny's Tea Room, run by the Jenny Lind Society.



Home of Carl J. Swenson, 1326 Cosper Avenue, as it appeared in 1902; now the home of Mr. and Mrs Stephen R. Butler, owners of Illinois Decorator Center

Gilmore J. Landstrom succeeded his uncle as president and continued through 1940.

When B.J. Knight became president of Skandia Furniture in 1890, The ROCKFORD DAILY REGISTER stated that "Messrs. Floberg and Bjorklund were talked of for president, but it was concluded that as Boomer Knight was the founder of Knightsville, and the Skandia Furniture Company the outgrowth of the founding, it was meet to place the attorney at the head of the industry." The Skandia factory continued to be a prominent landmark at the northwest edge of "Knightsville" for many years. In summer, when the windows were all open, the high-pitched whines of the big saws could be heard throughout the neighborhood. During the early years a large percentage of the men living in Knightsville worked at Skandia, although soon Rockford Desk Company built their factory next door, and many surrounding residents found employment at "Desk".

Skandia Furniture Company, which was originally capitalized at \$50,000, was extremely successful for many



Front view of Skandia Furniture Building as it appeared in 1965; the part at the left with lighter brick joined the Skandia and Rockford Desk buildings.



Rear view of Skandia Furniture plant (the side toward the river); taken in 1965, shortly before the building was razed.

years and paid good dividends to its stockholders. However by 1926 Carl J. Swenson "didn't like the way things were going," according to his son, Carl E. Swenson, inventor and former chief engineer at Mechanics Universal Joint. Mr. Swenson says that his father sold out his interest in the firm at that time and left the business; he later served as treasurer of the Swedish Building and Loan Association (now Home Savings and Loan).

Skandia continued to operate throughout the Great Depression, but the furniture business in general was being replaced in Rockford by machine tool manufacturing, and the war years of 1941-1945 were probably more detrimental to Rockford's furniture industry than the depression had been. The metal-working firms were getting the big government orders and could afford to pay much higher wages. In addition, all the huge walnut groves and most of the oak groves of the county had been cut, and wood had to be shipped in from other parts of the country at great expense.

According to Gilmore Landstrom, president from 1935 to 1941, Mrs. P. A. Peterson's stock in the firm was sold by her business manager to Edward S. Ridgeway of Chicago, making Ridgeway by far the largest stockholder; he then became president, with Landstrom as secretary and L.V. Locker as comptroller. By 1942, Ridgeway had sold the business, and the plant was occupied by a firm known as Skandia Manufacturing Company. Paul Ash of Chicago was president and Seymour Berman secretary.

In October, 1942, it was announced that the Superior Sleeprite Corporation of Chicago had purchased the factory and all its equipment. In the 1950s the old Rockford Desk building at 1102 North Second Street, which had been occupied by Free Sewing Machine Company, and the Skandia building were both purchased by the Gannon Manufacturing Company and the space of approximately fifty feet between the two structures was enclosed, making one long factory building. The entire compound was razed late in 1965 and is now owned by the Rockford Park District.

#### THE OLDEST HOUSE IN ROCKFORD Built by Jacob Posson in 1842

Probably few residents of Rockford are aware that the little white house on the northeast corner of North Second and Market Streets is very likely the oldest home in the city. Built by Jacob Posson in 1842, it has remained at that location for 135 years.

According to Charles A. Church, Winnebago County's most prominent historian, Jacob and Mary Posson came from Schoharie County, New York, in 1836. Schoharie County is just west of Albany, and was probably the birthplace of Jacob, but Mary was born at Salem, Washington County, New York. After their marriage, they moved to Niagara County. Their son Henry was born in 1836 at Medina, New York, which is in Orleans County about 35 miles east of Niagara Falls.

In 1837, according to Church, Jacob Posson "purchased land four miles east of Rockford, upon which he lived five years. In 1842 he bought property on the northeast corner of Second and Market streets." Posson had been a cooper in New York, but in Illinois he had first tried farming, building a log cabin and making various improvements. In 1842 he rented out his farm and decided to return to coopering, so he began to build a home and shop on the property he had purchased in Rockford.

While Jacob Posson was building his combination house and cooper shop, "he received injuries from which he died November 1, 1842." There seems to be no record of how he sustained these injuries or what they were; he may have fallen off the roof or from a ladder. There was a local newspaper at that time, the ROCKFORD PILOT, but there is no known copy of it later than October 6, 1842. The collection in the Rockford Public Library of the succeeding newspaper, the ROCKFORD FORUM, does not begin until early 1843, so no obituary of Jacob Posson can be found. When Mrs. Posson died in 1893, her obituaries merely mentioned that she and Jacob arrived in Winnebago County in 1836, but



Front view of the Posson house at 201 North Second Street. Large chimney on front wall was added later; otherwise exterior of house is almost exactly as it was built in 1842 by Jacob Posson

no more information about Jacob was given.

Three children, two sons and a daughter, were born to Jacob and Mary Sherwood Posson. The daughter, Mary A. Posson, married James M. Forbes and moved to Santa Barbara, California. One son, Fredric L. Posson, became a painting contractor; he lived on North Fifth Street until 1882 when he moved to Portland, Oregon. Henry A. Posson remained in Rockford and continued to live in the family home.

At the time Henry Posson died, it was said of him that he was the first white baby brought into Winnebago County; this may well have been true, as the family arrived in 1836. He was about four months old when they came here from New York State. After his father's untimely death when Henry was a boy of six, the family continued to live in the home Jacob had built for them. It must have been a struggle to get along without the father and husband, but young Mary Posson survived, mostly on income from property her husband had left.

Henry attended what schools Rockford had to offer at that time, and at the age of twenty he went to Medina, New York, to learn the trade of house and carriage painting. In 1859 he returned to Rockford and pursued his trade of painting until the outbreak of the Civil War. In September of 1861 he enlisted in Company G, Forty-fifth Illinois Infantry, and participated in the battles of Fort Henry, Fort Donelson, and Shiloh. This was sometimes known as Washburne's Leadmine Regiment, and had been raised by General John C. Smith. In the Battle of Shiloh, on Sunday, April 6, 1862, Henry Posson received a serious gun-shot wound in his right arm.

With others of his comrades who had fallen on the bloodstained field, Posson was taken to the Central Hospital at Paducah, Kentucky. There it was determined that irreparable damage had been done to his arm, and it was amputated. He remained in the hospital for almost three months, being discharged on July 2, 1862. He then returned



Side view of Posson home, facing Market Street. One story portion is probably where Jacob Posson planned to have his cooper shop.



#### To Rockford.

Mrs. Mary Posson was still living in the little white home built by her husband Jacob in 1842. Henry settled down there with his mother and taught himself to paint ~~with~~ one arm. He had been right-handed, but now he began to work with his left, eventually becoming as proficient as before he entered the army.

At the age of thirty, Henry Posson was still unmarried. About that time he met a lady about a year younger than he, who had also not yet found someone with whom she wished to share her life. Miss Hannah McClafferty was the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Roger McClafferty and had been born in 1837 at Annapolis, Nova Scotia. Henry and Hannah were married on September 19, 1867. They moved in with Henry's mother, and they all lived together in the little white house until Mary Posson's death on December 3, 1893.

Mr. Posson was a great lover of horses; he was considered a good judge of horseflesh, and his advice was frequently sought. He was a first class driver and usually owned a fiery steed. He adapted himself to the inconveniences of being without his right arm, and was able to drive as well or better with one arm than most men could with two. After continuing at the painting trade until about 1884, he became an expressman for a few years. Then, during the administration of President Benjamin Harrison, he was a mail carrier under Postmaster Thomas G. Lawler for two or three years, beginning in January, 1890. After that he retired permanently.

Henry and Hannah Posson became the parents of two children, George A. and Mary Alice Posson. George left Rockford at an early age, and returned very seldom. Little is known about him except that he died in 1908 when only forty years of age.

The daughter, Mary Alice, married Addison Burr, who was associated with Edwin and Freeman Burr in the Burr Sporting Goods Company. Alice Burr, a granddaughter of

The Posson monument in Cedar Bluff Cemetery. Buried on this lot are Jacob Posson and his wife Mary, an unnamed infant, George A. Posson, Henry and Hannah Posson, Addison and Mary Alice Burr, and Leroy and Alice Foss

Henry and Hannah Posson, married Leroy M. Foss, a science teacher for many years in Rockford schools.

Henry Posson died on November 2, 1912, at the age of seventy-six. After his death, Hannah continued to live in the historic old residence until she passed away in 1918. Her neighbors across Market Street to the south -- the Ennets -- kept watch over her, and if Mrs. Posson needed help in some way, she would hang a white cloth in a window toward Market Street. Then one of the Ennets would go over to find out what she needed.

When Hannah Posson died, the home was purchased by Nellie Ennett Perkins, who had married Henry Perkins in 1916. The Perkins leased the house to various renters for the next nineteen years. During that time, a fire damaged part of the inside. When Mrs. Perkins had it repaired, she had the two sitting rooms combined to form one living room. She also had a fireplace installed on the west (front) wall of the living room, toward Second Street, and the stairway was altered somewhat. Otherwise, the home has changed little since built by Jacob Posson in 1842.

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Cridlebaugh moved into the historic house in 1937. Mrs. Cridlebaugh, the former Beryl Ennett, is a niece of Mrs. Perkins. The Cridlebaughs raised their three daughters in the old Posson home, and Mrs. Cridlebaugh still resides there. Mr. Cridlebaugh, a machinist at Roper's and later at Beaver Gear Works, passed away on December 26, 1975.

As can be seen by the photographs, the rear part of the house is one-story. This is probably where Jacob Posson intended to have his cooper shop. There is no basement under that part of the house. The chimney formerly went through the center of the home, until Mrs. Perkins had the fireplace added. The large chimney was then built onto the front of the house, and the fireplace and furnace use the same chimney.

Could this be the oldest house in town? The cobblestone Herrick house on Broadway was probably not built before 1846; C. A. Church claims it was built in 1849, and yet it is often claimed to be the oldest. However, unless some proof can be given that another is older, the Posson house at 201 North Second Street will have to be considered the oldest residence in Rockford, and possibly the oldest building of any kind still standing in the city.

#### CHIEF BLACK HAWK (Continued from Spring Issue) By Mrs. Perry French

Black Hawk was a religious man and a firm believer in the metaphysical world. His medicine bag was never far from his side, with its religious artifacts. His belief in white as a symbol of something great or unseen was evident in his garb and his white war horse. Black Hawk believed that "what could be sold could be carried"; otherwise it

was a gift of the Great Spirit. It has been mentioned in a previous article that he was pious, believed wholeheartedly in the wisdom of the Prophet, and was convinced that the Prophet was imbedded with a bit of the Great Spirit. He often waved a white flag of truce, indicating he wished peace, if war could be avoided. The Battle of Bad Axe was a "rear guard action" as he fought desparately to hold the militia off until the old people, children and women could cross the river, showing him to be a protector of his people and a brave warrior.

Black Hawk knew humility, being placed in chains at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri. He was not an orator, like Keokuk, nor could he be "bought off". He was willing to fight for what he believed in -- freedom of the land, protection for his people. He was the last leader of the Indian tribes east of the Mississippi. He was a patriot of the Indian nations, developing leadership over the years by establishing himself with daring deeds of courage. He was a good father and liked children. His friendship was enduring, as his adopted son was a sibling of a friend who had been wounded and could no longer hunt or make war. His belief in the good spirit who lived in a cave in the rocks at Fort Armstrong shows him to be a person who looked for the good things of life more than the bad.

Iola Fuller quotes Tomah as saying: "Men who could talk were plentiful -- men of deep feeling were there, and men of clever thoughts, but aside from Black Hawk there was no one who was all of these."

George Catlin's portrait of Black Hawk shows him as "a man with a high forehead under a shaven skull, his roached scalp lock jutting up from it and a great beak of a nose projecting boldly. His wide-set eyes are somber and cold, his sullen mouth drawn in a melancholy line above a deeply dimpled chin."

Indians on the Mississippi referred to the steam boats as "big thunder canoes" and the railroad tracks as "tracks of the Iron Horse". Black Hawk rode on the steamboat "Winnebago".

The Mormons, with their village of Nauvoo south of Rock Island, near Quincy, did much to gain respect for the Indians of that area, as a Mormon leader named Brooks believed it was "cheaper to feed them than to fight them." The Mormon faith believed they were direct descendants of Israel so treated them respectfully.

#### HARLEM TOWNSHIP TOWN HALL By Mrs. Henry F. Hansing

In this article we will take you back in time to the 1874 Town Hall which is now part of Midway Village at the Rockford Museum Center, 6799 Guilford Road. The Rockford Museum Center is sponsored by the Rockford Museum Association, Friends of the Rockford Museum, and the Rockford Park

District.

When Congressman John B. Anderson helped dedicate a new \$95,000 Town Hall for Harlem Township government, on June 5, 1967, he stated that "the idea of a town meeting house dated back to the Pilgrim era over three centuries ago when it served as a religious center for the community. People built their homes in a cluster around the meeting house, as a means of protection. The first governmental town hall meeting was March 16, 1621, when the settlers of Plymouth Colony met to arrange for military protection."

The Town Hall at Harlem Village was part of a group of buildings built in 1874 at a cost of \$1,095. In the 1850s the Kenosha-Rockford Line between Rockford and Harvard was the reason for Harlem Village being located at Forest Hills Road and Harlem Road. When the Old Harlem villagers (then on the stagecoach line at Machesney Airport) learned where the railroad line would run, they moved over to the right-of-way.

In the 1840s the "Old Harlem" was a thriving little settlement with a schoolhouse also used as a church; a post office and a stagecoach stop on the route between Rockford and Janesville, Wisconsin. The first settlers came in 1835 and one of the first was Asa Taylor who traveled from New York to Chicago by wood-burning steam boat (with sails for auxiliary power), then from Chicago to Harlem in a horse-drawn cart. The land, which Asa bought, had sold for one dollar an acre in 1834 and two dollars an acre in 1835; when Taylor bought it in 1836, it was four dollars an acre. This land is now worth \$2,000 an acre.

Lewis Andrew Fabrique came from France around 1900 to settle on land which later became Machesney Airport. His son was the first railroad agent for the Harlem Station on the Kenosha Line. The line ran between Rockford and Harvard with twelve trains a day serving the community with mail, freight and passenger service.

Old Town Hall, seat of Harlem Township Government for over 90 years, was part of a settlement which included a small schoolhouse built in 1852; a grocery store in 1871 was built by Thomas Fabrik; a Methodist Church in 1869 was built; a post office in 1843; a blacksmith and wagon shop was built in 1871 by Alfred Turner; a cheese factory in 1882 -- built by F. Stevenson, and a sausage factory was built by Frank Rogers in 1919. A grain elevator was built in 1888 by F. Fabrik, and his son Louis carried on the business until 1922 when J. H. Patterson Company took over the elevator. In 1928 the population was about 1000. The 1960 census showed 14,404 and had increased to 15,000 by 1967. Harlem is second only to Rockford Township in population in Winnebago County.

(Continued in next issue)

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