

## NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 14

Spring, 1977

Number 2

### THE DONORS OF BEATTIE PARK By Robert H. Borden

Born in a simple frame house at 223 Park Avenue, Mary and Anna Beattie lived in the same home all their lives. Their father, John Beattie, had built it in 1845, eight years after arriving in Rockford as an immigrant Scotch-Irish carpenter.

John Beattie came to Rockford in October, 1837. Born in Northern Ireland on June 21, 1811, he emigrated to New York state in his early twenties. At the time of Beattie's death on December 3, 1889, George Kaye, a close friend, said, "I have heard him tell a hundred times how he happened to come to Rockford. The big fire in New York in 1836 was the cause. He came to Chicago and at that place he and Mr. Peters and Mr. Alling engaged a man with an ox team to take them to St. Louis. They started and when they reached the Kishwaukee they found it so high that they were compelled to swim the oxen across and then bring their goods over by rafts. Here the man who was to pilot them to St. Louis backed out and would not go any further and therefore they located in Rockford."

David D. Alling, another close acquaintance of John Beattie, gave a slightly different version of the same story: "Well, here am I, the last of that quartette of young men who came to Rockford in October, 1837. All the others have now gone .... I remember our trip to Rockford with ox teams. There were four of us, William Peters, John Beattie, Thomas Johnson and myself. I was headed for Rockford, the rest for St. Louis. We engaged a man and ox team to carry our chests. When we struck the Kishwaukee he said right flat that he would not go another step. It was a desperate strait and demanded desperate action. We told him that he would have to bring the goods to Rockford or die. I think it was Mr. Beattie who said: 'You go on to Rockford or we'll shoot you on the spot.' The man went on. After we reached Rockford he was allowed to return to Chicago, and it looked so promising here that the rest decided to stay with me."

The four men arrived in Rockford on October 9, 1837, after an eleven-day journey, and all remained for many years. William Peters was a partner of John Beattie in the building business, and died in 1887. Johnson eventually moved to California, where he also died about 1887. David Alling, who like Beattie became a building contractor, lived until August 1, 1898.

Shortly after settling in Rockford, Beattie returned to western New York, and married Miss Mary A. Davidson at Niagara Falls, Ontario. John and Mary had apparently known each other in Northern Ireland, where she was born on February 2, 1815. Beattie returned to Rockford with his bride, and they became the parents of seven children. However, three of them died before their parents. The oldest son, Alexander H. Beattie, was born in 1839. He studied to



Scene in Beattie Park in 1966. High-rise apartment building not yet built.

be a lawyer, and was admitted to the bar shortly before the outbreak of the Civil War. Upon the call for volunteers by President Lincoln, Alex Beattie enlisted in the 74th Regiment of Illinois Volunteers. Injured slightly at the battle of Missionary Ridge, he nevertheless continued fighting until being severely wounded in the assault on Kennesaw Mountain. He was then discharged from the army and returned to Rockford, engaging for a time in the hardware business. In 1866 Alex moved to Helena, Montana, and established the Beattie Company, dealing in mine holdings and real estate in Helena and Butte. He apparently was always bothered by his war injury, dying in 1884 at the age of only 45.

The second son, John H. Beattie, was born in 1841 and died in 1863. A daughter, Anna, was born in 1846 and died a year later. When another daughter was born in 1853, they also named her Anna; she lived until 1921. The other children were Edward, born in 1844, Mary I., born in 1849, and George, born in 1856.

When John Beattie arrived in Rockford, he was already trained as a carpenter, and many of the early houses of the city were built by him. He also did a considerable amount of work on the 1844 County Courthouse, although exactly how much does not seem to be recorded. Charles A. Church wrote that "Derastus Harper and John Beattie were the architects" of the 1844 Courthouse. At the time of Beattie's death, the Rockford DAILY REGISTER reported: "It was not a voluntary act on his part that made him the owner of the valuable property on West State Street, opposite the courthouse. He was virtually compelled to become the owner of it. At the time he came into possession of it he had completed some carpenter work on the old courthouse and this property was given to him in payment for his work. He did not want it, and at first refused to take it, but seeing that if he did not he stood but little show of ever receiving any pay, he took the property. The day that he became the possessor of the lots he sat down and wept, feeling that he had been



Gazebo built in Beattie Park in 1923 in honor of the Beattie sisters, Mary and Anna

defrauded." In later years, Beattie has sometimes been referred to as the contractor for the old courthouse, but this was probably not the case.

After claiming that Beattie had put "the finishing touches on the old courthouse...", the Rockford DAILY GAZETTE had a different explanation of how he had come into possession of the West State Street property: "Many years ago Mr. Beattie built a house for a man named Taylor and agreed to take the half block at the northwest corner of State and Church streets for his pay. The house was a small one, but money was scarce and the effort came near swamping Mr. Beattie financially. He managed to pull through, however, and lived to see his lots become as valuable as any piece of property in the city." Both papers seemed to agree that most of the Beattie wealth stemmed from that West State Street property, although supposedly Alexander Beattie had left quite a fortune to the family when he died in 1884.

After Mrs. Beattie died in 1891, only the four children remained. Edward and George had both gone to Helena, Montana, following the death of their oldest brother, probably to take over his business affairs. They remained in business at Helena the rest of their lives. Edward died there late in 1914, the only one of John Beattie's children to leave a family. Early in 1915 George, who had remained a bachelor, began to have heart trouble, and his physician recommended that he move to California. His two sisters accompanied him there, but apparently it did him no good, so in May of 1915 they returned to Rockford. George continued to live with his sisters in the family home until he died November 27, 1915.

Having inherited the assets of not only their parents but two of their brothers, Mary and Anna Beattie were left rather wealthy, and they were always generous with their money. On June 9, 1914, they donated Beattie Playground to the Park District; located north of Chamberlain between



Lizard mound  
in Beattie  
Park which  
lacks a head  
because it  
was worn off  
by the Beattie  
children

Longwood and Hall Streets, it consisted of almost four acres, but in 1961 it was purchased for \$170,000 to make way for the east side approachways to the Whitman Street Bridge. A new Beattie Playground was then developed along Adams Street between Rural Street and Greenwood Avenue. The Beattie sisters also donated regularly to such worthy causes as the Public Library, Home for the Aged, Humane Society, Children's Home, Public Welfare Association, and Second Congregational Church.

Mary Beattie died in November of 1920, and following her death a document was probated which bequeathed her share of money and properties to her sister Anna, with the intimation that the survivor would provide for the ultimate disposition of the estate. When Anna died less than three months later, their attorney, Robert Lathrop, made public a deed which the Beattie sisters had executed on April 8, 1918, in which they deeded their entire homestead, bounded by Park Avenue, North Main Street, Mound Avenue (now Indian Terrace), and Rock River, to the Rockford Park District.

However, for a few days it was not known what would become of the rest of the Beattie fortune. Their lawyers had never drawn a will for them, but their friends were certain that one had been written. Finally on February 18, four days after Anna's death, their hand-written will was located in the home. It provided for bequests to many local charitable organizations, as well as to some individuals and also granted over \$58,000 to the city of Helena, Montana, for a memorial park in honor of the Beattie brothers.

The deeding of their home and property as a park was subject to certain conditions, and these conditions were accepted by the Rockford Park District when they accepted the property. The conditions were that the property was to be officially called "Beattie Park", it was to be made a place for "rest and relaxation", "noisy amusements" were to be forbidden, no roads or drives could be constructed through the property, and the Indian mounds and native



Old Beattie residence  
at 223 Park Avenue,  
built by John Beattie  
in 1845; razed by the  
park district in 1929

trees on the land could not be disturbed. The Park Board officials were said to be elated over the new park. It was felt that it would greatly relieve the congestion at Waterworks Park (now the municipal parking lot along North Wyman Street), and would "afford a place of quiet and repose for the many who have in the past been forced to use the court house lawn."

Paul B. Riis, park board superintendent at that time, recalled that some years earlier when he was looking at the Indian mounds on the Property, he had commented to the Beattie sisters that it was strange that the lizard mound was built without a head. One of the ladies had replied, "It had a head, but we wore it off sliding down hill on it when we were little girls!" Mr. Riis expressed the wish that Beattie Park be changed little, if at all. Since it was the desire of the donors not to change the mounds or trees, he suggested that the entire property be left as it was at the time they died.

For several years, the old Beattie house was allowed to stand and was occupied by Clarence T. Pedlow, park board horticulturist who later became superintendent. Erected in 1845 by John Beattie, the east wing of the house was about seventy-six years old at the time title passed to the Park district; the remainder of the residence had been added later. It had all remained in good repair, according to contemporary reports. However, late in 1928 the park commissioners decided to have it razed "because of its extreme age and dwindling usefulness." There had been some effort in the early 1920s to allow its use by the Rockford Day Nursery, but this had been rejected by the park board. On December 30, 1928, the Rockford MORNING STAR printed an editorial suggesting that it be made a museum. This also was rejected by the commissioners, and in the spring of 1929 John Beattie's home was destroyed. Only the mounds and trees now remain from the days when the Beattie children romped over the grounds, sliding down the head of the lizard mound.

THE OLD MANSE, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS  
AND RALPH EMERSON, ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS  
By Mrs. Gordon (Georganne) Eggers  
and Mrs. David (Lucretia) Paddock  
(continued from last issue)

Rev. Emerson wrote, not as spectator, but as an eye witness out among his men. He encouraged them, but with a double anxiety; first, that they must not fire first, or unless fired upon, and second, that they must not fail to fire back. "Let us stand our ground. If we die, let us die here." His diary frequently mentions his visits to Cambridge, his constant service with the army, his breakfast and frequent meetings with George Washington, and his participation at Bunker Hill. It was he, William Emerson, who invited Harvard College to move to Concord as it was being overrun with soldiers. And it was he who accompanied men from Concord and Lexington to Ticonderoga, as accepting God's Will. He never returned, Age 34. The Old Manse is a continuing monument to him; so is the first church of Concord and "a bit of the independence of the USA".

Ministering to the world didn't stop with the early death of William Emerson. For, like his grandfather and his father, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a descendant of five generations of ministers, became one himself. After a brief and difficult pastorate in Boston, and following the untimely death of his beautiful young bride of 18 months, he resigned his ministry and became the master of pen and platform. But, as his critics say, his addresses were still always sermons, and his mission in life was profoundly religious and moral. Emerson loved Concord from his earliest childhood when his widowed mother brought her family to live with his beloved grandmother and revered step-grandfather at the Manse. When residing with them, several years later, after travels in Europe grieving over the death of his wife, he wrote his first Essay, NATURE, a reflective prose poem, divided into eight chapters. To his dear friend, Carlyle, in England, he wrote, "I send you a little book I have just now finished, an entering wedge, I hope, to something more worthy and significant. This is only a naming of the topics on which I would gladly speak and gladder hear". What foresight.....

Not too long after this publication, he remarried and moved his bride, Ellen Tucker, into a house purchased for \$3,500 on the Cambridge turnpike, the route of the retreat of the redcoats. It stands today. They lived there for 47 years. His home was a home for ideas and hospitality, and its scholarly resident drew other literati to the town. In the meetinghouse the day before his second marriage, he delivered a Concord Bicentennial address for which he had studied all the old records and original sources. The talk lasted an hour and three-quarters, and won Emerson a permanent passport to the affection of his fellow townsmen. From middle age on he had great popularity. He was not a warm person, but even the common people loved him as a speaker, not because they understood what he was talking about, but



Ralph Waldo Emerson as  
a young man

just to hear him speak. Many speakers have something to say, but don't know how to say it. He could do it all. And so let us reflect on his words today. For instance, his description of the four seasons of the year, entitled THE YEAR:

"There is no flower so sweet as the four petalled flower  
which science much neglects; one gray petal, one green,  
one red and one white."

or

"One comes, at last, to learn that self reliance, the  
height and perfection of man, is reliance on God."

Or, as he wrote of Concord:--

"Not many men see beauty in the fogs  
of close low pine woods in a river town  
But unto me not morn's magnificence  
Nor Rome, nor joyful Paris, no, nor even the song  
of any woman that is now alive,  
Hath such a soul such divine influence  
Such resurrection of a happy past."

As a scholar, he was often asked to address literary meetings. In 1837 he spoke to the Phi Beta Kappa society in Cambridge. This report followed: "A much needed monition to the cultivated class of persons in New England to think for themselves instead of taking their opinions from Europe or from books...This was an event without former parallel in our literary annals, a scene to be always treasured in the memory for its picturesqueness and its inspiration.. What crowded and breathless aisles, what windows clustering with eager heads, what enthusiasm of approval. It was Emerson's intellectual Declaration of Independence." So much more can be said about this genius, but perhaps for our country it is depicted ever so simply in the massive lobby



Ralph Waldo Emerson  
as an old man

of Rockefeller Center where there is a gigantic mural depicting the history of the United States. There are just two recognizable figures in that mural; one is Abe Lincoln, the other Ralph Waldo Emerson....Lincoln the greatest man of Action; Emerson the greatest man of Thought.

Sixty-five years after the famous three-minute Concord battle, in 1842 Nathaniel Hawthorne and his new wife, Sophia Peabody Hawthorne, moved into the old Manse, the William Emerson home, as renters. They came in the summer months and relished their seclusion and privacy. The Manse is set back from the road by a tree lined drive. They purposely lived a very self-contained life for several months. Nathaniel Hawthorne would set himself afloat on the slow Concord River and during these months he planted his garden and literally lived out the meaning of the word Concord, from which the village had been named. In approximately 1635, twelve families purchased six square miles from the Indians, smoked the pipe of peace, and the name Concord commemorates the friendship that was never broken.

Let me quote two descriptions which I think are rather humorous. To quote Nathaniel Hawthorne: "Never had such a poor little country village been invested with such queer, strangely dressed, oddly behaved mortals, most of whom took upon themselves to be important agents of the world's destiny, yet were simply bores of very intense water." Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry David Thoreau, Bronson and Louisa May Alcott, Wechanning, H. D. Longfellow bores???? Yes, they all were wandering these woods in the 1840s, writing and occasionally meeting each other on the paths and by the fireside for conversation. Here is another quote which emphasizes Concord's heritage: "Little Concord had NOT been ill-treated by the fates, with a great original thinker (Ralph Waldo Emerson) at one end of the village; an exquisite teller of tales at the other (Nathaniel Hawthorne) and the rows of New England elms in between."

And, as Thoreau's son said, "I have never got over my

surprise that I should have been born into the most estimable place in all the world and in the nick of time."

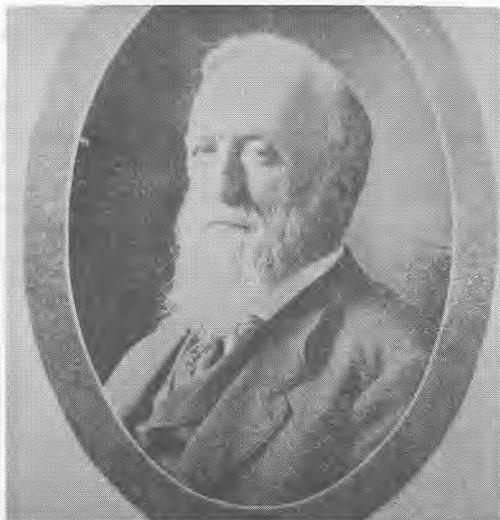
Before summer ends and we enter the Old Manse to explore it with Hawthorne and Sophia, let me give you a few more words of Hawthorne's concerning his close environment which serve to begin to draw a better picture of this contrary, but ingenious, fanciful writer who seemed to see through darkness to collect his stories. "Many strangers come in the summer to view the battleground. For my part, I have never found my imagination much excited by this or any other sense of historic celebrity", and speaking of the original monument (an obelisk not more than 20 feet in height) -- "it is such as befitted the inhabitants of a village to erect in illustration of a matter of local interest rather than that which was suitable to commemorate an epoch of national history." Quite a different approach than that of his neighbor, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and his words "the shot heard round the world".

Nathaniel Hawthorne, the first great American novelist, author of THE SCARLET LETTER, THE HOUSE OF SEVEN GABLES, TANGLEWOOD TALES, MOSSES FROM AN OLD MANSE, etc., says of himself, "So far as I am a man of really individual attributes I veil my face; nor am I nor have I ever been, one of those supremely hospitable people who serve up their own hearts, delicately fried with brain sauce, as a tidbit for their beloved public." Yes, from my reading, Hawthorne was, if not a recluse, at least one that was silent with his lips but talked with his pen. The father, as it were, of a great tradition in American fiction.

Thus with the coming of fall, the gray parsonage begins to assume a larger importance. Hawthorne says the Manse itself was a house in which imprisonment by the rainiest or wintriest weather was rather a privilege than affliction.

To make ideas more real to us, we often relate them to our own experiences. The title, "Mosses From An Old Manse" was puzzling to me. However, Hawthorne says, "After a week of rain, the old unpainted shingles of the house were black with moisture, and the mosses of ancient growth upon the walls looked green and fresh, as if they were the newest things and an afterthought of TIME." I brought that description to my own remembered view of the tall flowers, grasses and ferns actually growing on the roofs of the cabins and out buildings of Norway. I guess remembering this lovely phenomena made me realize how the green mosses on the Old Manse inspired this amazing collection of stories.

We are not literary critics. We all should be fascinated by this village, its famous inhabitants and the Old Manse. Only a few sentences will serve to describe the literary and personality differences of Ralph Waldo Emerson and Nathaniel Hawthorne. First: Hawthorne says, "Mr. Emerson, the mystic, stretching his hand out of cloudland in vain search of something real", and "Transcendentalists -- the pen and ink men who address the sympathies of the multitude but are too remote, shadowy and unsubstantial to suit the tastes of the multitude." Nathaniel Hawthorne, on



Rockford's Ralph Emerson, partner of John H. Manny, Jesse Blinn, and Wait and Sylvester Talcott

the other hand, was writing tales, stories, fiction -- often of a dark and sometimes allegorical nature. Some of his writing almost reminds me of what we might call Science Fiction today. Perhaps to sum up the difference between these two personalities, we should quote this passage of a letter of Sophia Peabody Hawthorne to her mother: "Mr. Emerson has a sunbeam in his face. If Mr. Hawthorne had the gift of speech like Mr. Emerson, for instance, it would be different, but he was not born to mix in general society. His vocation is to observe and not be observed. Mr. Emerson delights in him, -- he talks to him all the time, and Mr. Hawthorne LOOKS the answers."

So Nathaniel Hawthorne says, "Nor in truth had the Old Manse ever been profaned by a lay occupant until that memorable summer afternoon when I entered it as my home. A priest had built it, a priest had succeeded to it, other priestly men from time to time had dwelt in it; and children born in its chambers had grown up to assume the priestly character."

The much-described study of the Old Manse occupied by Nathaniel Hawthorne and the Emersons, with its three windows set with little old-fashioned heavy glass panes, each with a crack across it, peeped between the willow branches into the orchard and down to the Concord River giving perhaps a fitting ending to my thoughts. The Concord River, only slightly less sacred to Hawthorne than the Old Manse; the leaves of the trees that overhang the Concord -- whispering to him "Be Free -- Be Free".

And so our world becomes smaller from Concord to Rockford in 1851. But you may ask, "How?" As you may recall, I spoke of the Rev. William Emerson, Ralph Waldo Emerson's grandfather. His sister, Hannah, was Rockford's Ralph Emerson's great grandmother. It was he, Rockford's Emerson who lived at 427 North Church Street, who was my great



Home of Ralph Emerson at 427 North Church Street; later the residence of Mr. and Mrs. Norman F. Thompson, daughter and son-in-law of the Emersons. Mr. Thompson was president of Manufacturers National Bank. The home was razed in the early 1930s.

Grandfather, and whose property was donated for the site of the present Mendelssohn Building.

Ralph knew his Concord cousins well, although he resided in Hollis, New Hampshire, a 24-mile trip by horseback. Both Ralphs were of the 7th generation of Emersons, although Ralph Waldo Emerson was some twenty years older than my great grandfather.

Fortunately he, too, was a master of pen and he documented his earliest recollections, which our family possesses. His parents resided in Andover, Massachusetts, where his father was a clergyman, and later in Colebrook, Conn., a rural village in northwest Connecticut. My mother resides there today in an ancestral home built in 1767. After graduating from college, Ralph Emerson began life as a school teacher. Finally leaving the East, he headed for Bloomington, Illinois, where he intended to study law. It was through the advice of his close friend, Lincoln, whom he met in Bloomington, that he finally abandoned law for industrial pursuits. He moved to Beloit; then to Rockford in 1851, living here until his death in 1914. He was at first a hardware merchant in partnership with Jesse Blinn; then a manufacturer. He was prominently connected either as an officer, director, owner or partner with over forty different manufacturing, commercial, financial, agricultural, educational and charitable enterprises, some of national reputation. These enterprises include manufacture of agricultural implements, knitting machines, hosiery, cotton goods, woolen goods, lumber, two insurance companies, two national banks, and two electric companies, one of which did the entire street lighting of the city of Rockford. His home was the first in Rockford to be electrified. In 1889, when he wanted this done, he had to employ a Chicago firm, since no one here was equipped to do the work. Only the business district had electricity and power was made avail-

able only by running a special wire from State Street to the Emerson house.

Now, I would like to quote from his recollections. Perhaps they will allow you, too, to recall similar incidents in your family's past.

"In my boyhood, the first telegraph wire was being stretched. I used to hear men sagely discuss how hats could be made when all the beavers should be killed. Father treated that question but was seriously apprehensive of the results on the rural population when all the whales should have been killed out of the ocean. There would be no lamp oil and candles would be scarce. He hailed a few years later, with great joy, the invention of the lamp which would burn lard and the other that would burn alcohol. I was shown by a companion as one of the marvels of Boston Harbor, a ship of 600 tons."

(To be concluded in next issue)

\*\*\*\*\*



Old Guilford Town Hall,  
Later Owned By Guilford Hope Grange  
As It Appears in 1977

(See Article on Pages 7-10 Of Last Issue)

\*\*\*\*\*

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois. Address correspondence to Secretary, Hazel A. Kluck, 1614 Huffman Blvd. 61103  
President: Clement V. Burns. Editor: Robert H. Borden  
Assoc. Editor: Hazel M. Hyde Asst. Editor: Timothy Borden  
Typist: Mrs. Warren Burlend Membership Chmn: Taylor Decker

SOCIAL STUDIES DEPARTMENT  
JEFFERSON HIGH SCHOOL