

NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 15

Winter, 1978

Number 1

TRIAL, EXECUTION, AND REVENGE by Billie Whitsitt (Concluded from last issue)

A few nights after the newspaper of July first had been printed, the office of the Star was entered and the type dumped onto the floor. Thurston wrote:

"At the time of the destruction of the office, Knappen was living at Harlem with a newly married wife. Word was sent to him of what had been done, and he speedily put in an appearance. The raiders had simply taken the forms of one side of the paper and turned them upside down on the floor, and they were not in very bad shape either. When Knappen came he stirred the 'pi' laying on the floor with the stove shovel, and mixed the fonts of type in every case in the office."

Thus, according to Thurston, Knappen deliberately made the messed-up type even worse than it was. This appears to be the action of a bitter man, making himself into something of a martyr. Thurston wrote further:

"When the STAR office was 'pied,' by a mere accident I knew who did it, and the parties were aware of my knowledge; they also knew I would not betray them. I never breathed a syllable of this for thirty years after, when I told an editor of one of the local papers, that D. S. Haight, Charles Latimer, and Adam Keith were the men."

That July first issue was Knappen's last paper while in Rockford.

It is reported in one source that he went to Michigan and died there. As yet nothing more is known about him, and Michigan's Vital Statistics Department could not pinpoint his existence and death on such vague facts.

Knappen is a particularly striking personality shown by the many facets of himself he unconsciously exposed through his newspaper and through Thurston's first-hand observation of him. He was essentially a humorless man, and not always a straight-forward man, but he had a sense of the needs of society that few men in the village of Rockford could apparently appreciate.

The "unknown" among the three men who "pied" the STAR office is Adam Keith. Charles A. Church, in his HISTORY OF ROCKFORD AND WINNEBAGO COUNTY (1900), says of him:

"Adam Keith came from Indiana. He was born in Pennsylvania in 1795. From there he went to Ohio, thence to Indiana. His name was given to Keith's creek. Mr. Keith removed from Illinois to Wisconsin in 1846. He died at Beaver City, Nebraska, in 1883, at the age of eighty-seven years."

Daniel Haight continued the battle over the court house, and a few years after he lost to the west side moved to Texas. There was a rumor that he joined the Confederate army, and later died in Fort Worth, Texas.

A little more is known about Charles Latimer's last

days. Sometime between that summer of 1814 and 1844 he moved to the little town of Potosi, Wisconsin, and from the newspaper printed at Lancaster, Wisconsin, the following is known: While drinking in the Potosi Saloon, Latimer said that he thought foreigners should have the right to vote after a residency of three months, and he began to make some unkind remarks about the peculiarities and character of Americans. (It is suggested in the article that Latimer was a Canadian.) A Mr. Gloster became annoyed at the comments and knocked Latimer down; Latimer continued talking in the same vein, and Gloster knocked him down again, giving him a black eye. Latimer began to drink a great deal more, and at this point turned to a Colonel White and accused him of blacking his eye. Colonel White also knocked him down.

This happened on the last Saturday in February, 1844. The next day Gloster apologized to Latimer, and they parted apparently on good terms. On Monday Latimer wrote a note to Colonel White telling him to either publicly apologize or fight a duel.

The duel was arranged for Tuesday morning, Gloster acting as second to Colonel White, but at three A.M. they were all arrested for planning a duel. They were released on bail and continued their plans for a duel but moved the place of meeting to Iowa Territory; but once there, friends persuaded them to let a committee consider the matter. The committee reported that there really was no misunderstanding and neither man needed to apologize, and at this they temporarily calmed down. However, the situation changed the next day, as reported by the GRANT COUNTY HERALD of March 2, 1844:

"...late on Wednesday ... he heard Gloster speak very disparagingly of and even threaten him. He may have been deceived by an excited imagination, ... he was certainly, in no way approaching intoxication... He was informed by one whom he styled his friend, that Gloster had again used his name in connection with unfriendly and menacing language. This was undoubtedly false, but was certainly believed to be true by Latimer.

"That he was suffering from the effects of extreme excitement there can be no doubt... A crushing recollection of the past--a bitter dread of the future, determined him to kill or be killed, and thus terminate an excitement that had become more painful to him than death."

As it was reported, Latimer took a gun, and meeting Gloster in the street, threatened, then shot him, but only grazed his clothes. Gloster went to get a gun of his own and, when he returned, was threatened again by Latimer. At this point Gloster shot and killed him. At a hearing later Gloster was freed because he acted in self-defense.

The editor of the GRANT COUNTY HERALD added this to the account of the shooting:

"Latimer had the misfortune of possessing an air and manner somewhat bordering upon superciliousness; and when opposed to opinion, of becoming... overbearing.---With many virtues he blended two faults which utterly proved his ruin.

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He was intemperate, and when excited by intoxication, his favorite theme of late, and one which he always advocated with much zeal and warmth, was the equal and even superior qualifications of foreigners to enjoy and exercise the full rights and privileges of the elective franchise."

ROCKFORD FOUNDERS DAY CEREMONY by Hazel M. Hyde

A new awareness of the date, August 24, 1834, has come about recently. Efforts have been made to establish an annual Founders Day Celebration, to honor those men who made the first settlement in Rockford. The importance of their coming to this area was that they were permanent settlers. A group of persons interested in local history gathered at Rockford Museum Center on Sunday, August 28th, 1977, to explore the possibility of establishing an annual time of remembering Germanicus Kent, Thatcher Blake, and Louis Lemon.

A monument, designed by Gene Horvath, has been placed near the former post-office building, now an Art Center, and close to the area of Kent Creek where these men first erected their sawmill. The purpose of the erecting of this sculpture was the same as that of the Founders Day Ceremonies and was to stir the minds of the people of the Community.

The program in the Conference Room consisted of speeches by President Clem Burns of the Rockford Historical Society, Hazel Hyde, and Taylor Decker. The artifacts were on display and were formally presented to the Rockford Museum Center. Acceptance was by President Ralston of the Center. Special guides were arranged for the day by Mrs. Richard Marsh. Beside the artifacts, a booklet concerning Germanicus Kent, prepared by Taylor Decker and Clem Burns was available. The booklet had pictures of Kent, his possessions, and the home where he was born in Connecticut.

Who were these men that we honor as the founders of the city of Rockford? Dr. Charles Church has preserved a brief biography and related what happened near the Rock Ford.

Germanicus Kent was born in Suffield, Connecticut, May 31, 1790, about 187 years ago. He resided in New York state for a time. In 1819 he spent a short time in Blacksburg, Virginia. About 1822 Mr. Kent was in Huntsville, Alabama, where he engaged in the dry goods business in partnership with Preston Yeatman. On June 7, 1827, Mr. Kent married in Blacksburg, Virginia, Miss Arabella Amiss who was born in Culpepper, Virginia, April 9, 1808. Later he was a business partner in the firm of Patton, Donegan and Company, at the Bell Cotton Factory on Flint River, about nine miles from Huntsville. He was said to have been interested in abolition of slavery, but he owned several slaves and brought one to the Rock River area. Germanicus went from Alabama to Galena, Illinois, where his

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Germanicus
Kent

brother, Rev. Aratus Kent, was a home missionary.

Thatcher Blake was born in Turner, Oxford County, Maine, March 16, 1809. In 1834, he left Maine to go West by way of Boston, Albany, Buffalo, Cleveland, Cincinnati, Louisville, and St. Louis. Church told that at St. Louis, Blake met soldiers who had been in the Black Hawk War. They described the Rock River Country and told of the lead mines in Galena. Thatcher Blake went to Galena where he became acquainted with Germanicus Kent and made plans to explore Rock River Valley.

It was June 1834 when they left Galena in a Democrat wagon. They went north into Wisconsin Territory to the Pecatonica River near Hamilton's Diggings, a small mining village operated by a son of Alexander Hamilton. From a man named Ransom they secured a canoe. They continued to explore the Pecatonica and Rock Rivers looking for a good place to settle.

Their first landing was at a point now included in Freeport. It was then an Indian camp known as Winneshiek's Village. Winneshiek was the chief of a band of from 200 to 300 Indians. Mr. Kent went ashore and explored the country some distance from the river. The Indians gathered around Kent in a manner that caused him to be alarmed. He rowed out to the middle of the stream to avoid having the supplies taken. When they left the Indian Village they continued to the junction of Rock River. Continuing down Rock River they came eventually to the mouth of a small tributary later given the name of Kent Creek.

Kent wrote in his journal under date of August 18, 1834, "Hired Mr. Blake at eighteen dollars per month to live with me on Rock River, to take charge of my business and do all kinds of work, to remain with me from one month to twenty-four months."

Both Kent and Blake located claims. Mr. Blake's claim included parts of sections 20 and 21. Mr. Kent's claim



Location along
Kent Creek
Where the Saw
Mill Stood

comprised a tract of land that included the Tinker estate and the water-power, and extended south to the Montague Addition. The first work done by these men was the building of two cabins.

Standing in the classroom, some years ago, the history students were told about the effort to introduce slavery into Illinois. Only one man ever lived in Winnebago County as a slave. At first he was called Lewis Kent, but most accounts say he took the name of Lewis Lemon. The year was 1829 when in Alabama, Germanicus Kent purchased from Orrin Lemon, a young black boy named Lewis, who had been born in Wake County, North Carolina. He was about seventeen years old at that time and his purchase price was \$450. When Germanicus Kent moved north, he intended to sell Lewis, but was persuaded by Lewis to let him remain with a master he knew.

When these two reached St. Louis, Mr. Kent made an agreement that Lewis could purchase his own freedom in six years and seven months for \$800, with ten percent interest. Lewis, however, obtained his freedom in four years and four months.

In Rockford City Directory and Gazateer for 1869 there is an account of the Proceedings of the County Commissioners and the exact wording of the indenture that stated Lewis Lemon is now and forever free. A description of the man included states: The said Lewis is aged about twenty-seven years; in person he is about five feet eight inches high, well built, rather stout and weighs about one hundred and seventy pounds, features are good, dark yellow complexion, open and frank countenance, mouth prominent and large lips." It was part of a document signed September 6, 1839. It was made a matter of record March 11, 1842, and signed by Selden M. Church, clerk. In addition it was stated that "he had demeaned himself, as a sober and honest person."

Lewis obtained some land and earned his livelihood by cultivating garden produce. He died in September, 1877, according to Mr. Church. His funeral was attended by



Sculpture on
South Wyman
Street Depicting
Blake, Lemon
and Kent



Home of
Thatcher Blake
(razed several
years ago), which
stood at 2328
South Main Street

members of the Old Settlers Society.

Rockford Morning Star, April 7, 1976, carried an article telling of the project of Wilson Middle School children that led to the marking of Lewis Lemon's grave in Greenwood Cemetery as one of the founders of Rockford. On a visit to that grave, unmarked for nearly 100 years, you would see a black granite marker with white lettering. It reads: Born Slave--died Free, Lewis Lemon, 1812-1877, a founder of Rockford.

In regard to markers, the exact resting place of Germanicus Kent's young daughter, Sarah, is not precisely known and is unmarked. She died and was buried in Block 35 of Rockford's first cemetery in 1837. When this cemetery in west Rockford was abandoned, many bodies were moved. It is thought that Sarah's body was not moved.

Joe Lamb told the story in the Rockford Register-Republic, August 2, 1977, under title, "Two Researchers Hit Historical Jackpot" that told of the success of Clem Burns and Taylor Decker in following the footsteps of Germanicus Kent. The adventure began with a packet of letters sent to Blacksburg, Virginia, where Kent spent his last days with his daughter, Mary Irby Kent Black, and where he died in 1862. The letters were to any genealogical society, or historical society, or library, or living relative, and enclosed in a letter to the postmaster.

It was a lucky chance that brought the reply from the postmaster that his wife was the great-granddaughter of Germanicus Kent and the family would be delighted to cooperate. In May Clem Burns, Curator of Rockford's Memorial Hall and President of Rockford Historical Society, and Taylor Decker, a local history buff who has copied many area cemeteries and is Treasurer of Rockford Historical Society, spent two days in Blacksburg. They interviewed Mrs. Harlan (Nita Black) Little and researched historical records in Virginia. The family gave several family mementoes that had been handed down and are in remarkably good condition considering their age.

Clem Burns considers the engraved portrait of Germanicus

Kent, believed to have been made in New York in the 1820's as the most important item that will find its place in the Rockford Museum Center, 6799 Guilford Road. Taylor Decker believes it to be the only portrait of Kent in existence.

Young visitors and others, too, will probably give the longest look to Germanicus Kent's beaverskin top hat. The piece of silverplate bears the Kent family initials. Scholars and historians will note the documents which include the purchase contract for a cotton mill in 1829 at Huntsville, Alabama and a bill of sale for two slaves. The christening robe is an heirloom of the Kent Family.

Kent came to the Rock River Valley at the suggestion of his brother, Rev. Aartus Kent, a Presbyterian minister of Galena. This brother founded Beloit College and had an important part in the founding of Rockford Female Seminary, that was later named Rockford College. Dr. Donald Walhout wrote a well documented essay on Rev. Kent, based on some documents owned by Beloit College.

In Galena Germanicus Kent teamed up with Thatcher Blake who was seeking farm land. Kent wanted to find a site for a saw mill. The two found the ideal spot for the mill at the mouth of the creek that bears Kent's name and winds through west Rockford.

Kent was fifty-four when he left Rockford in 1844, a hundred and thirty-three years ago. His health was poor and he had met financial reverses. He had owned his saw-mill, a store, a hotel, and a river ferry that crossed the Rock River.

In appreciation of the mementoes returned to Rockford, the Rockford Historical Society at the suggestion of Burns and Decker are having a bronzed marker made for the gravesite in Blacksburg.

The name Midway gave way to the name Rockford at the suggestion of Mrs. Germanicus Kent, it is believed.

The story of the discovery of the Kent artifacts to

present to the Rockford Museum Center comes from the two men, Clem Burns and Taylor Decker, who worked together to contact relatives of Germanicus Kent and to bring back tangible items. Now in Rockford Museum there are former possessions that we can touch and see. It makes this man step forth for us as an individual.

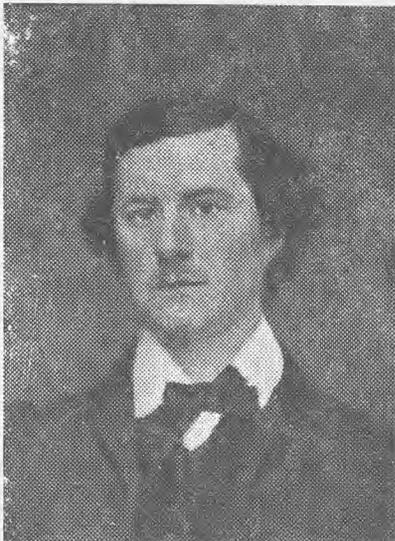
Children visiting the museum and Midway Village will see objects that can unlock imagination. They will be able to envision the people who came 143 years ago in 1834 to build a sawmill, to earn a living, to build homes, and serve as a nucleus of what has become the city of Rockford.

THE DEATH OF COLONEL ELMER EPHRAIM ELLSWORTH

By Robert J. Lindvall

Death caused by war is always a reason for sorrow and grief. The Civil War of the United States is no exception. The death of its heroes, such as General Stonewall Jackson and others, caused individuals and the nation sorrow and grief. This article is going to examine one of the Civil War heroes, Colonel Elmer Ellsworth, and how the grief and sorrow caused by his death affected the nation and President Abraham Lincoln, in particular, at the time of Ellsworth's death.

Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth was born Ephraim Elmer Ellsworth April 11, 1837, in Malta, Saratoga County, New York, according to Ruth Painter in her book COLONEL ELMER ELLSWORTH; Charles A. Church, however, gives the date and place as April 23, 1837, at Mechanicsville, New York. The young man later changed his name to Elmer Ephraim so it would not be confused with his father's name Ephraim D. At age ten Elmer started in the mercantile trade as a clerk.



Colonel Elmer Ephraim
Ellsworth

This led him to similar jobs around the country until he ended up in Chicago about the time of the Crimean War (1853-1856). This war, since he had always been a military man at heart, interested him so much that he wrote to France for some books about the Algerian Zouave unit. Ellsworth learned French so he could read the books; then he began to organize and train the first Zouave units in the United States in Chicago and towns around Chicago.

In Rockford, Illinois, one of the cities in which he started a unit, Ellsworth met and fell in love with a banker's daughter and asked to marry her. But the banker Charles Spafford, suggested to Elmer he find a more secure type of employment than military training. He suggested that Elmer study law. Elmer's law study led him to an association with Abraham Lincoln under whom he served as a clerk in Lincoln's Springfield law office.

When elected President, Lincoln took Ellsworth, who had become one of the Lincoln household, to Washington as a security officer. But when war broke out, Elmer again had his military fever back (he had never really lost it, and he had even devised a plan to reorganize the state militia) and enlisted. Ellsworth was commissioned a Colonel of the New York Fire Zouaves, a unit he had organized while in Washington.

On May 24, 1861, Ellsworth and his men took control of Alexandria, Virginia, in order to protect Washington, D.C. Ellsworth, spotting a Confederate flag flying atop the Marshall House, ascended the building and took the hated flag down. As he was descending James Jackson, the hotel owner, shot the Colonel. Ellsworth was given a full military funeral in the East Room of the White House where his body lay in state until his funeral. The body also lay in state in the New York City Hall and in Albany as it was going to his burial place in Mechanicsville, New York.

Since Colonel Ellsworth was one of the first martyrs to die in the Civil War, his death was felt more deeply than many others killed later in the conflict, because



Charles H. Spafford,
Father of Carrie
Spafford



Ellsworth's Monument at Mechanicsville, New York. (Photo provided by the late Stuart K. Golding.)

death from war was something new for most of the people. This personal loss, so to speak, felt by the nation, can be shown in some of the editorials and articles written about Ellsworth after his death. The NEW YORK WORLD expressed grief and sorrow this way: "He was a hero in the fairest and most captivating sense of the word. He was as handsome as Murat and as brave as Ney. He possessed to a degree that winning power over men by which, through all history, great captains and leaders have been distinguished. He was a commander by the imperial right of birth."

The ROCKFORD REGISTER of June 1, 1861, a small community local weekly paper, also had an editorial about Ellsworth because of his contact with the city before the war. The REGISTER had this to say about Ellsworth: "Although young, he had proven himself to be surpassed by no man in the land as a teacher of military rules and drill in this country."

Although the two newspapers mentioned above expressed the sorrow felt by the nation at the time of Ellsworth's death, all did not share the same feelings about Ellsworth, especially in the South: The KENTUCKY STATESMAN of May 28, 1861, had this to say about Ellsworth and his death: "We rejoice in the death of Ellsworth and only regret that every man who follows him did not share the same fate. Mr. Jackson was too noble a man to fall victim to the infamous thieves of Ellsworth's regiment....We express the heartfelt sympathy of every true Southern man in this community, when

we tender to our fellow citizens our sincere condolence."

The death of this "martyr", who was to be remembered throughout the war with the slogan "Remember Ellsworth", was felt by no individual more deeply than President Lincoln, Ellsworth's friend. The grief suffered by Lincoln at the time of Ellsworth's death has been expressed in various ways and degrees by the newspaper correspondents at the time of the death, and authors of Lincoln biographies.

Carl Sandburg, in his book, ABRAHAM LINCOLN THE WAR YEARS, explained Lincoln's sorrow of the news of Ellsworth's death this way:

"In the White House a New York HERALD man, with Senator Wilson of Massachusetts, saw the President standing at a window looking out across the Potomac: 'He did not move until we approached very closely, when he turned around abruptly, and advanced toward us, extending his hand: "Excuse me, but I cannot talk."...to our surprise the President burst into tears, and concealed his face in his handkerchief...."I will make no apology, gentlemen," said he, "for my weakness; but I knew Ellsworth well and held him in high regard. Just as you entered the room, Captain Fox left me, after giving me the painful details of his unfortunate death."'"

Isaac N. Arnold in his book, THE LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, simply said "his death was deeply mourned by the President," while Charles Carlton Coffin in his book, LIFE OF LINCOLN, said in more and stronger words "Great was the President's Grief. It was the beginning of his many sorrows. The first hostile shot had struck into his own household, as it were, and taken one whom he tenderly loved."

Ida Tarbell in her LIFE OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN expressed the President's grief this way "he felt the vainest affection," while Noah Brooks in his book, LINCOLN, had this to say about Lincoln concerning the death of Colonel Ellsworth:

"Lincoln was overwhelmed with sorrow...he found time to sit alone and in grief stricken meditation by the bier of the dead young soldier of whose career he had cherished so great hopes."

And Eleanor Gidley in her book, STORY OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, said only "Ellsworth's death affected Mr. Lincoln with peculiar sorrow." But the best example of President Lincoln's sorrow is his letter to Ephraim D. and Phoebe Ellsworth, Elmer's parents. In the letter Lincoln said: "My Dear Sir and Madam:

"In the untimely loss of your noble son, our affliction is scarcely less than your own. So much of promised usefulness to one's country, and of bright hopes so suddenly dashed as is his fall. In size, in years, and in youthful appearance a boy only, his power to command men was surpassingly great. This power, combined with a fine intellect, an indomitable energy, and a taste altogether military, constituted in him, as seemed to me, the best natural talent in that department I ever knew.

"And yet he was singularly modest and deferential in social intercourse. My acquaintance with him began less

than two years ago; yet through the latter half of the intervening period it was as intimate as the disparity of our ages and my engrossing engagements would permit. To me he appeared to have no indulgences or pastimes; and I never heard him utter a profane or an intemperate word. What was conclusive of his good heart, he never forgot his parents. The honors he labored for so laudably, and for which in the sad end he so gallantly gave his life, he meant for them no less than for himself.

"In the hope that it may be no intrusion upon the sacredness of your sorrow, I have ventured to address you this tribute to the memory of my young friend and your brave and early fallen child.

"May God give you that consolation which is beyond all earthly power.

"Sincerely your friend in a common affliction,
A. Lincoln"

This letter William Barton in his Book, PRESIDENT LINCOLN, said "is among the most beautiful of his messages."

It can be concluded, then, the death of Colonel Elmer Ephraim Ellsworth deeply affected the people and the nation because he was the first officer shot in the war, he was young (twenty-four), and he was at the threshold of his life. This gave Ellsworth a Horatio Alger image to the people. Here was a man that all could look up to; he had lifted himself up by the bootstraps and become a "military genius" in the training of Zouave units.

The President, on the other hand, was deeply moved for other reasons. He had lost a son, so to speak, because Ellsworth and the President were close. According to Henry B. Rankin, in PERSONAL RECOLLECTION OF ABRAHAM LINCOLN, President Lincoln before going to Washington made the comment about Ellsworth "... he is the greatest man I ever met."

Not all the people, though, agree that Colonel Ellsworth was the type of person to deserve the amount and type of eulogy accorded him. Ellsworth's critics say he was too ambitious and he wanted to make a name for himself; therefore he acted in haste when he took down the confederate flag. A second reason the critics are questionable of Ellsworth's hero image is that he was one of the first killed in the war and this distorted the true facts about the man in the eye of the people and the nation.

But after taking the critics into account, one must agree Ellsworth left a profound impression on the nation. The nation realized that more young, energetic, and skillful boys were going to die in the war. The mark on President Lincoln's life left by Ellsworth's death is that the President realized this awful war was going to trouble and involve the President personally as it continued.

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois. Address correspondence to the president, 2119 Paradise Blvd., Rockford 61103
President: Gertrude A. Mead Editor: Robert H. Borden
Assoc. Editor: Hazel M. Hyde Asst. Editor: Timothy Borden
Typist: Mrs. Warren Burlen Membrshp Chmn: Taylor Decker