

## NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 15

Autumn, 1978

Number 4

### THE SWEDES OF THE OLD SIXTH WARD

by Andrea K. Nelson

The lands now occupied by the city of Rockford, Illinois, at one time formed a part of Virginia's claim to all "land throughout from sea to sea west and northwest." The place where Kent Creek flows into the Rock River and where the city of Rockford now stands, was a lonely spot in almost uninhabited country in 1834. Stephen Mack, the first permanent white settler in the area, established a village at the mouth of the Pecatonica River called Macktown. That same year Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake established claims and built small cabins on the west side of the Rock River. Kent built a saw mill on the creek that bears his name. The first settler of what is now east Rockford was Daniel Shaw Haight, who arrived April 9, 1835. He selected a tract of land where he built the first east-side cabin. His tract now comprises a considerable portion of the business and most thickly settled residential district.

The infant settlement was at first called Midway because it marked half the distance between Chicago and the mining town of Galena, Illinois, for travellers bound west. The town received its present name shortly thereafter because it represented the best place to "ford" the "Rock" River. Settlers in the area came first from New York and the New England states, but during the latter half of the nineteenth century they came in a steady stream from Ireland, Sweden, Italy and many other countries in Europe.

Within a few weeks after the first railroad train arrived in Rockford, in August, 1852, the first group of Swedish immigrants arrived. A Chicago pastor, Reverend Erland Carlsson, put these first Swedes on a train and told them, "Don't get off before you reach the end of the railroad." At that time the tracks did not extend across the Rock River to the west. The result was that these newcomers got off the train with their meager belongings and settled down on the east side near the railroad terminal, located on Fourth Avenue between Kishwaukee and Fourth Streets, on the present site of what is called Northwestern Park.

When other Swedish immigrants arrived, they naturally got off where their countrymen were located. The result was that the east side of the Rock River became predominantly Swedish and their number west of the river was small. Many of their descendants have continued living on the east side ever since. Swedish was spoken almost exclusively in the Seventh Street business district until the early 1920s and to a slightly less degree in the Broadway district. No street in America was more Swedish than Kishwaukee Street. As a matter of fact, it was said that a letter from Sweden bearing "Kishwaukee Street, America" was sure to find its way to Rockford. These Swedes were ambitious men, skilled with their hands in wood and metal working. Most of them built their own homes as the family's nest-egg increased.



628 Kishwaukee Street  
Home of John A. Glans,  
partner in the Kish-  
waukee Street Cash  
Grocery Company; also  
a machine hand at  
Rockford Wood Working  
Company

By the year 1880, there were about 3,500 Swedish-born residents, or about 27% of Rockford's population.

The following study deals with the 426 males having two Swedish parents living in the sixth ward of Rockford during the Federal Census of 1880. An attempt was then made to locate these males twenty years later. They were traced through their names, addresses, and occupations. Certain comparisons of occupations, schooling, and housing will be made. The sixth ward, on the east side of the Rock River, was created out of the old second ward in 1871. Its boundary lines are East State Street on the north, Kishwaukee Street on the west, and the city limits to the east and south. It is located in the southeast quadrangle of the city. The sixth ward was chosen for this study because of its high proportion of Swedes, as previously indicated.

Perhaps it would be a good idea to pause here for a moment to discuss some of the limitations of the sources used to compile the raw data for this study. The greatest weakness of the 1880 census manuscripts has to do with its reliance on oral questioning and answers. This, especially when dealing with immigrants who do not speak English well, can lead to misunderstandings, misspelling, and incorrect answers to some questions. One must also take into account human error in taking the census. Most errors were marked or crossed out, but not all. In addition, handwriting is sometimes rather difficult to read 97 years later. The



809 Kishwaukee Street.  
Home of Gustav Floberg,  
carpenter at Stevens  
and Deuel Manufacturing  
Company

City Directory for Rockford in 1900 is subject to errors not only by the printers, but also by those who originally put it together. Another problem was the duplication of names, such as twelve John Nelsons, all working at furniture factories.

As stated above, the study deals with 426 male Swedes. Of this number, 260 could be traced and 166 could not. The break-down is as follows:

|                                   |     |
|-----------------------------------|-----|
| Number of fathers traced          | 69  |
| Number of sons traced             | 104 |
| Number of unattached males traced | 87  |
| Total                             | 260 |

Note that there is approximately an average of two sons per father traced. The number of unattached males includes not only single men, but also fathers with no sons as well as fatherless boys living with mothers or uncles.

The reasons for not being able to trace the other 166 Swedes are several. For example, undoubtedly some of them were not in the 1900 City Directory because they had either died or had moved out of the city. It is also possible that the names of some were left out by the compilers of the City Directory by accident. Another reason might be the spelling of their names. What appeared as "John Shelleen" in the 1880 census manuscripts is correctly spelled "John Kjellin" in the city directory. An attempt was made to check all possible spellings during the tracing, but some undoubtedly eluded me.

Between 1880 and 1900, 43 of the 260 Swedes had died. This was determined by finding their widows, often living with their sons, listed in the City Directory. It is to be assumed that a certain percent of those not traced had also died during the twenty years.

The accompanying map shows a large portion of the old sixth ward of Rockford; East State Street and Kishwaukee Street are two of the boundaries. The circles on the map



In 1880, this was No. 910 Second Avenue, home of Frank Wettergren, an employee of the wire works. In 1900, the address of this home had changed to 924 Second Avenue, residence of John Wettergren, a laborer, Henry J. Wettergren, a clerk, and Alma and Mary Wettergren, both employed at Nelson Knitting Company.

represent the location of a Swedish family within the ward in 1880, according to the census report. There are two main clusters. The larger one is north and east of the railroad tracks. The other cluster is south of the tracks and along Seventh and Eighth Streets. The rest of the ward was inhabited by immigrants from other areas, particularly from England, Ireland, Scotland, and the New England States.

The X's on the map represent the location of a Swedish family in 1900. These are the 260 males that were traced from the 1880 census. Here the clustering pattern is harder to determine. There is still a large cluster east and north of the railroad terminal, but now they extend farther east, indicating that the city is spreading eastward as it grows. It is also becoming clearer that Swedes are starting to move along Kishwaukee Street. The circles with an X inside indicate where a family lived at the same location both in 1880 and in 1900.

The 1880 cluster along Seventh and Eighth Streets has broadened both east and west by 1900. It seems that the Swedes are replacing the old residents of the area. Although it almost appears that the Swedes are spreading out thinner into the community, one must remember that more and more immigrants kept arriving in Rockford during the twenty-year period and they too were moving into the same area all around the 1880 residents, probably pushing out families of other nationalities. After the turn of the century



In 1901 this was the residence of Per A. Peterson, a cabinet-maker at West End Furniture Company. Located at 1120 Second Avenue

and especially after the 1920s, this area was almost 100% Swedish.

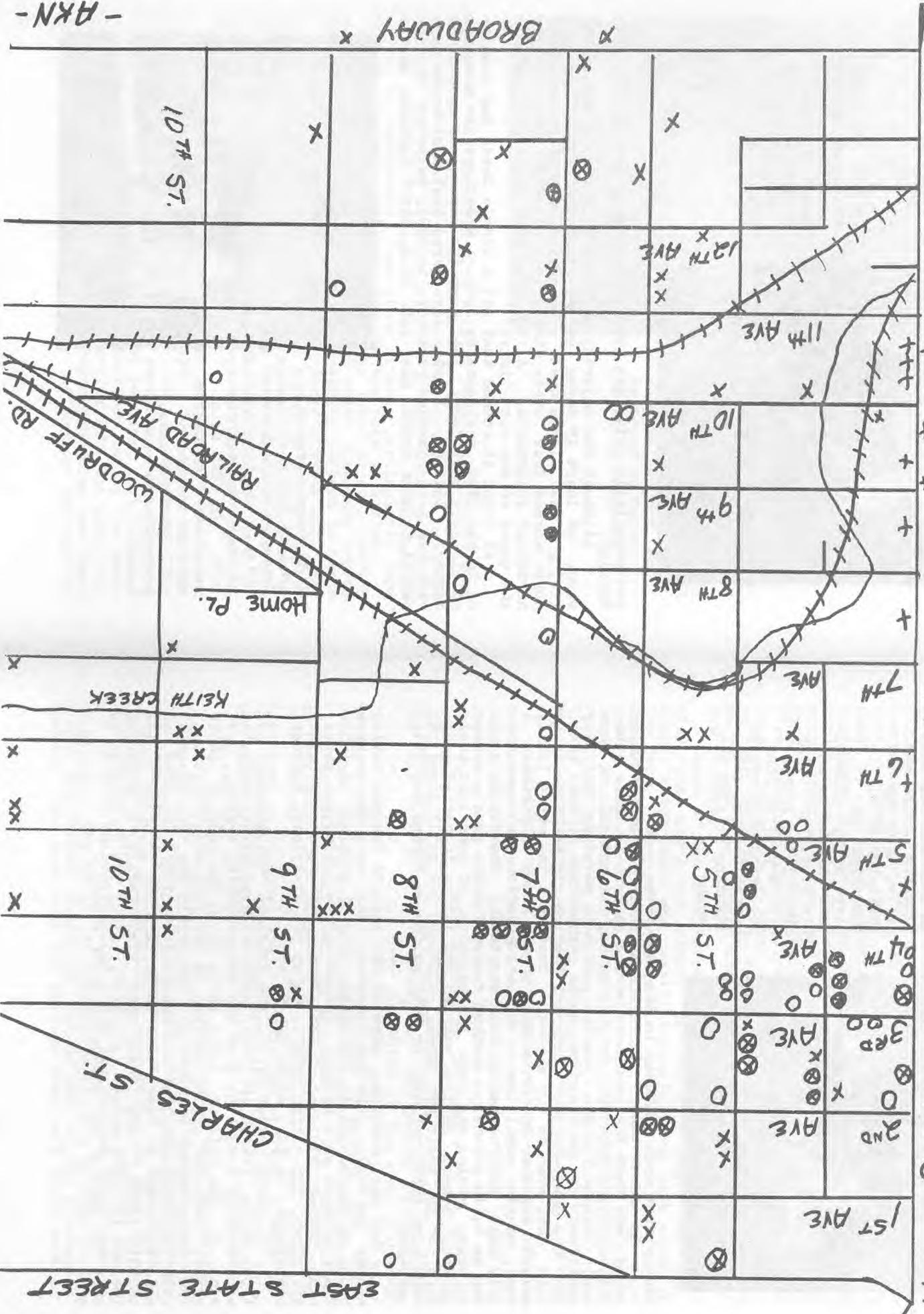
Although the majority of the sample stayed within the ward, at least 19 moved across Kishwaukee Street and were living a few blocks west. An additional 16 males moved north across East State Street to establish homes in the northeast quadrangle. A few more moved south and east, to the edges of the city limits.

At first it seemed that not a single Swede had remained in his 1880 residence by 1900. Sometimes the move was as close as next door, just down the street, or around the corner. However, I later discovered that most house numbers had been changed somewhat in 1894, so those who appeared to have moved next door or a short distance on the

1132 Fourth Avenue, in 1901 the residence of Frank Palmquist, a machine hand at Rockford Desk Company. In 1880 Palmquist was a carpenter with an address of 1112 Fourth Avenue, probably the same house.



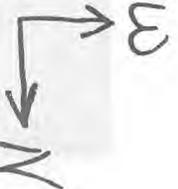
-AKN-



KISHWAUKEE STREET

+

○ RESIDENT 1880  
 × RESIDENT 1900  
 ⊗ RESIDENT 1880 & 1900



EAST STATE STREET

CHARLES ST.

10TH ST.

9TH ST.

8TH ST.

7TH ST.

6TH ST.

5TH ST.

4TH ST.

3RD ST.

2ND ST.

1ST AVE

3RD AVE

4TH AVE

5TH AVE

6TH AVE

7TH AVE

8TH AVE

9TH AVE

10TH AVE

11TH AVE

12TH AVE

13TH AVE

12TH AVE

11TH AVE

10TH ST.

BROADWAY



In 1900 and for several years before and after, this was the residence of C. F. Nordstrom, who in 1881 lived at 904 Kishwaukee. Nordstrom and his sons, Martin and Eben, later formed the C.F. Nordstrom Sons Co., manufacturers of cement blocks. Still standing at 1304 4th Avenue

same street were probably in the same house.

My first thesis in regard to those who had actually moved was that the men were moving closer to their jobs. This may have been true in some cases, but not all. A more basic reason for the Swedish people to move was that they preferred to own their own homes rather than to rent them. And the newly-arrived immigrant Swedish did not like to go into debt even to buy a home. Instead, the whole family worked together to accumulate enough money to purchase a home, renting until then. This accumulation would undoubtedly take several years, but eventually the family could buy or build a home. Another reason for the great number of males moving was that the majority of sons left their parents' homes, getting married and living in rented quarters or in their own homes, although 30% still lived at home with their parents, or with whichever parent had still survived.

Let us, however, examine the idea of Swedes moving nearer to their jobs for a moment. What were the occupations of the Swedes in the sixth ward of Rockford in 1880? Their careers were varied, including the following: physician, tanner, minister of the gospel, shoe merchant, painter, glove and mitten maker, maker of stockings, butcher, blacksmith, tailor, watch maker, etc.

A clear majority of the original 460, and also of those males traced in 1900, were involved either with the wood-working trades or with the metal-working trades. Several of the tailors lived above or in the rear of their shops, but what of the workers in the furniture factories? The large number of Swedish immigrants was coincidental with the development of the Rockford furniture industry, to make the city a rival both to Chicago and to Grand Rapids in this field. And where were these furniture factories located in this city? At first, along the Rock River to make the most of the available water power.

The first large furniture factory organized by Swedes was founded in 1876. Called the Forest City Furniture Company, it was located on Railroad Avenue between Seventh and Eighth Streets in the area just south of the heavy Swedish concentration in 1880. In the next years, several more furniture factories were established in the "forest city", such as Rockford Standard Furniture in 1887 and Skandia Furniture in 1888. By the year 1888, 1,055 persons were employed in furniture factories along Railroad Avenue, near transportation lines, and many of them, probably most, were Swedish. Note again the map of the sixth ward. There are five factories along Railroad Avenue, all producing furniture. Therefore, a great many employed workers were already near their jobs. In fact, it seems as though many factories had been located where they were in order to be near the workers.

Most of the metal-working industries seemed to be located right along the river, particularly near the dam, where water power was easily accessible, on both sides of the Rock. Many of the sons who were out of school, or at least not attending school by 1880, were listed on that year's census as employed at "weaving wire". This fact leads one to hypothesize that either wire-weaving was a job requiring youth or that it was an ill-paid job which required little training. At any rate, none of those who were wire weavers in 1880 had the same job twenty years later.

In 1880, 81 of the 104 sons traced were in school. These boys' ages ranged from 6 to 16. Boys over 16, and even some younger, were usually out in the work force unless they were handicapped in some way. Of those in the work force, 50% were engaged in the same work in 1900 as they were in 1880. The other 50% was made up in large part by those who went to work in the furniture industry, leaving such jobs as weaving wire, or who became bookkeepers, reporters, etc. Just over one-third of the sons followed their fathers' professions. This group includes not only second-generation workers with wood or metal, but those sons who became vice-presidents or secretary-treasurers of their fathers' companies, as the sons of S.A. Johnson did in Rockford. For some of the remaining two-thirds of the sons traced, it is to be hoped that schooling led to an improvement -- at least two boys attended college. Many became bookkeepers, clerks and the like, but most broke into the furniture business, forsaking tailoring, blacksmithing or janitorial.

In summary, it would be impossible to make generalizations on the Swedes in America using this study because each area the Swedes settled in was different in many ways. They did not always encounter an area with so many trees or an area situated geographically near water and near Chicago or a hundred other characteristics. It is, however, possible to make generalizations about the Swedish experience in Rockford. The influx of immigrants did not broaden to include the Swedes until the second half of the nineteenth century. But once they had arrived they left their mark on

the city, making it the city of industry it is today. They came, all with their own special skills, and living together in a clustered community, they built a city famous for its furniture and its tool and die manufacture.

(Sources: Federal Census Manuscripts for Rockford in Winnebago County, Illinois, 1880; ROCKFORD CITY DIRECTORY FOR 1900; Beijbom, Ulf, SWEDES IN CHICAGO; Church, Charles A., PAST AND PRESENT OF THE CITY OF ROCKFORD (1905); Hewes, Amy, THE ROCKFORD AREA IN 1946; Nelson, C. Hjalmer, SINNISSIPPI SAGA; Nelson, C. Hjalmer, WE, THE PEOPLE; Rowe, Ford F., ROCKFORD, STREAMLINED.)

### SPECIAL COOKIE RECIPES

#### Golden Carrot Cookies

Mix thoroughly 1 cup shortening and  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup sugar. Blend in 2 eggs, and then 1 cup mashed cooked carrots or baby food. Sift and stir in 2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoon salt. Optional --  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup shredded coconut or nuts. Drop about 2 inches apart on lightly-greased baking sheet. Bake at 350 degrees until set (about 8 to 10 minutes).

#### Orange Icing

1/3 cup butter  
3 cups confectioner's sugar  
3 tablespoons orange juice

Mrs. Mabel Golding

#### Cream Cheese Squares

Mix - 1 cup flour, 1/3 cup BUTTER,  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup firmly-packed brown sugar, and  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup chopped nuts. Filling: 8 oz. soft cream cheese,  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup sugar, 1 egg, and 2 tablespoons each of milk and lemon juice. In large bowl, combine flour, butter, brown sugar, and blend mixture 2 to 3 minutes so it looks like pie dough. Stir in chopped nuts. Take out 1 cup and put aside. Pat other in 8 x 8 un-greased pan. Bake 350 degrees for 8 to 10 minutes. Mix filling and stir until smooth and put on top of crust. Spread the cup of mixture on top. Bake 23 to 30 minutes. Don't let it get too brown. Cut when cool. Store in refrigerator.

Mrs. Mabel Johnson

### Poppy Seed Butter Slices

1 cup soft butter or margarine  
1 cup sugar  
1 cup brown sugar  
2 eggs  
1 teaspoon vanilla  
1 teaspoon baking soda  
2  $\frac{3}{4}$  cups sifted all-purpose flour  
1 teaspoon salt  
2 teaspoons cinnamon  
1 teaspoon ginger  
 $\frac{1}{2}$  cup poppy seeds

Cream butter and sugars until fluffy. Add eggs one at a time, beating well after each addition. Stir in vanilla. Mix and sift baking soda, flour, salt and spices; stir in. Stir in poppy seeds. Mix thoroughly with hands. Mold into smooth roll about two inches in diameter. Wrap in foil; chill several hours or overnight. Cut in thin slices with a fluted vegetable slicer. Bake on ungreased baking sheets at 375 degrees, 10 or 12 minutes or until lightly browned. Makes about 5 dozen.

Mrs. Gertrude Mead

### FROM DUSTY RECORDS TO NEW PERSPECTIVES

by Hazel M. Hyde

(Continued from last issue)

Mrs. Charles Vaccaro (Florence), now deceased, and a valued member of Rockford Chapter Genealogical Records Committee, photocopied her "Eddy Family History" for relatives and gave six copies for libraries remembered by DAR.

Mrs. Clarence Lainson published her family history and was for many years absorbed in record collecting.

The most important project of the Rockford Chapter genealogical records committee has been the copying of the existing church records of Centennial United Methodist Church up to the year 1915; working on it over a period of about five years. Among the workers have been: Mrs. Harold Pedersen (Gertrude); Mrs. Harold Hyde (Hazel); Mrs. Charles Vaccaro (Florence); Mrs. J. Warren Rowland (Kay); Mrs. James Short (Monette); and Mrs. Perry S. French (Frances). The compiling of the material, typing, indexing, presenting copies to the church, and sending to the state DAR genealogical records chairman has been a tremendous undertaking, to be completed in the Bi-Centennial year. The past year the local chapter again placed first in the state with the number of pages submitted: 7,000 pages.

Cemeteries have been copied throughout the county by DAR. Another local person who has copied Winnebago County Cemeteries is Taylor Decker. Heritage House has published four volumes of Illinois Cemetery records by Hazel Hyde and Taylor Decker. Mrs. Gaylen Andrews (Marjo) has compiled a list of civil war veterans buried in the county and has visited abandoned, weed grown cemeteries.

The Gill Funeral Home of Byron, Illinois, records were copied by Louise Lindstedt, Gladys Dirksen, and Gertrude Pedersen. One of the largest contributions was made by Mrs. Anna Stearman Conners of Columbus, Indiana. It consisted of 14 copies of the Sturman or Stearman Family History, of which Jack Stirman of Rockford is a member. One of my ancestresses was Sallie Sturman or Stearman, according to the Daniel Parker Bible.

Miss Christine Young and Mrs. Ethel Smith, co-compilers with Mrs. Hazel Hyde of 14 volumes of Cemetery Records, 1 volume of Estate Settlements and 2 volumes of Marriage Records of Spencer County, Indiana, have donated published books to the Rockford Public Library because of the interest of several local people in the records of Spencer County, Indiana, made famous as the boyhood home of Abraham Lincoln. My maternal lines can be traced in these records.

A very historic family tree was that of Miss Frances Walker, whose father was Rockford's first superintendent of schools, and for whom Walker School was named.

Miss Faithe Armstrong, retired head of Rockford Public Library, uses her skills as Lineage Research Chairman. She assisted the genealogical records committee in copying from the stones in Middle Creek and Kishwaukee Cemeteries.

It has been my privilege to work with Mrs. Joan Reid of Rockford Public Library in the Oral History Project. As a member of Rockford Historical Society, I have spent time in taping interviews with people who have lived many years in Winnebago County. The tapes are preserved, but also they are transcribed and made into books. These bound copies are one way of preserving accumulated memories and observances of people now living, for future local historians.

Perhaps it has been futile to try to name persons involved with local history and record collecting. Many unnamed people have given family records and copies of documents or have done yeoman service in the cause of preserving records or in locating data. Mrs. Arland Honeycutt (Blanche), for example, as Membership Chairman, must use a wide variety of genealogical skills.

Miss Hazel Kluck has given service to the Freeport Genealogical Society as well as serving as secretary of the Rockford Historical Society. Mr. Jack Baxter has compiled a history of the New Milford area. Mr. Bill Condon has written of the Kishwaukee area and is exploring that region further. Mr. Hal Nelson has edited the Bi-Centennial Book, "We the People", concerning Winnebago County's ethnic groups. Robert H. Borden is editor of NUGGETS OF HISTORY, which deals with local families and history. The list is far from complete, but some people wish to receive a few words of encouragement concerning their own research.

(Continued in next issue)

\*\*\*\*\*  
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 Burlend Membshp Chmn: Blanche Alden