

Nuggets of History

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REMINISCENCES OF THE BETTS AND STEARNS FAMILIES

By Wilbur W. Betts

My great grandfather, Lloyd Stearns, moved from Chesterfield, New Hampshire, in 1835 to Homewood, Illinois, just outside of Chicago. He used to stop at three log cabins in Rockford on his way to Galena to check on his claims in the lead mines. At that the settlement on Rock River was called Midway.

A little later than that, Lloyd Stearns moved to Rockton. In a bound volume of the PRAIRIE FARMER magazines of 1843, 1844 and 1845, in my possession, is his signature on the front flyleaf: "Lloyd Stearns - Rockton, Illinois".

Just a few years ago I had a marker erected on the grave of Lloyd Stearns in the West Side (Greenwood) Cemetery. It was Lloyd Stearns' grandfather, Ebenezer Stearns who was a Revolutionary War soldier. When I was investigating the family line, I was having trouble finding my great grandfather's father's brother, Ariel Royal Stearns. In one account he was not listed. As a result I borrowed THE STEARNS FAMILY by Van Waggenen from Harvard University. It lists over 12,000 members of the Stearns family, and among them was my great grandfather, Lloyd Stearns. The account almost matched the account in my family Bible, written by my grandmother, Harriet Stearns Betts.

On one page of the Van Waggenen book is the following account:

"In the genealogy of the Stearns family published in 1901 over eleven thousand persons were mentioned. Among these were one hundred and thirty-two graduates of colleges, universities, etc.; eighty-three clergymen; eighty physicians; fifty-nine lawyers; twelve principals of academies and high schools; twelve professors of colleges; one chancellor of a state university; one dean of a divinity school, three presidents of colleges; one superintendent of instruction (Argentine Republic); eleven authors; five editors; one bishop of Pennsylvania; one general manager of railroads; one president of railroads; one president of a telegraph company; twenty farmers; two governors; three lieutenant governors; two secretaries of state; eleven state senators; thirty-six colonial or state representatives; two speakers of the house; two supreme court judges; five mayors; two generals; twenty two colonels; eleven majors; fifty-six captains; and one hundred eighty-two private soldiers."

Lloyd Stearns' house still stands in Rockton. It is a fine looking old stone house and is across the square from the Old Stone Church. It faces north; the church faces south. The house is all covered with vines.

In the HISTORY OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY by H. F. Kett, published in 1877, is this entry on page 555:

"Betts E. B., South Bend Mill, situated at the mouth

of Kill Buck creek; General Custom Grinding; making "new Process Flour" on all grists ground; P. O. New Milford; owns a half interest in the above mill, value \$600; 2½ miles south of New Milford; Republican and Baptist; born in Jenner Tp. Sommerset Co., Pa., Jan. 15, 1824; came to this State in 1846 and settled in Du Page Co., where he lived until 1855; came to Winnebago Co. in 1855...."

The other half owner of the mill was my great grandfather Lloyd Stearns, who had been the original owner. E.B. Betts came along one day and Stearns hired him. Betts married the boss' daughter, Harriet Stearns, and they were my grandparents. Their account book of the mill and their personal living expense account, in both of their handwritings, is a real treasure. I have the pen with which Lloyd Stearns made the entries in this book. I also have his glasses --- pince-nez glasses which he wore on his nose. I also have his clock of 1830, and above it is his picture taken about 1880.

I saw their mill in 1911. My father and brother were in the front seat of the fringed top surrey, and my mother and myself were in the back seat. That particular day we were driving a team of nice looking horses, and we had made the trip from Rockford just to see the mill. There was a laundry stove outside the mill, and half buried in the mud were several large gears. The old mill wheel was still there, and the building was intact. It was a three-story building and pegged together with tapered pegs. When I sent the mill tools to Abraham Lincoln's Village of New Salem a few years ago, I also sent them a number of these pegs, which were used in building before the advent of nails.

On that day long ago my father took me for a walk along the banks of the Kilbuck and showed me where in the spring the high water washed out the graves of the Sac and Fox from which he used to gather arrow heads and axes. The Sac and Fox used to come there to camp as late as 1870 from their homes in Iowa where they had been moved. It used to frighten my father so that he would run to the top of the mill and hide.

In 1912, the old mill was moved up the road a piece to the farm of Clayton Hoisington where just a few years ago it was torn down. The mill stones which remain are in a pile outside the house of the Hoisingtons. Some of them were used to build a sidewalk. These mill stones were imported from France. The one I have in Seattle has peculiar slashes across its face. Clayton Hoisington said that it was used to grind barley.

(Editor's note: The author of the preceding article, Mr. Wilbur W. Betts, a retired aeronautical engineer with the Boeing aircraft company in Seattle, spent his boyhood in Rockford. These reminiscences were written in 1979.)

HOW DEER CAME TO NORTHERN ILLINOIS (Taken from a letter from the late George Stevens to Game Warden A. Ogilby, April 10, 1906)

In September, 1895, H. A. Rothwell (father-in-law of George Stevens) sent Stevens a doe from Clintonville, Wisconsin. It had been caught by an Indian the preceding spring. She was tame as a dog, and Mr. Stevens soon found out that the only way to tame a deer was to take it entirely away from all other deer and feed it by hand.

He raised two young ones by hand and they would come and drink from a person holding the bottle, but as soon as they were fed they were off and no one could get near them. Mr. Stevens had a buck given to him by Judge Campbell of Polo, Illinois. Twins or triplets were born every spring. He kept them in a yard fenced in by woven wire eight feet high, but some of the deer would jump over that. They would go to the woods but come back and stray around the fence every few days. The only damage they did was to eat the young apple trees and the clover hay stacked around. They never touched the corn or other grain.

In March of 1904, a tornado wrecked his fence and the deer escaped. They stayed around a few days and then left. Most of them stayed in a radius of fifteen miles. Five of them, including "Fannie" (the old doe) made their home in an adjoining orchard.

Several groups of five or more were seen around by neighbors from then on. Neighbors were complaining that they were bothering their corn and that was the reason for Mr. Stevens writing the letter to the Game Warden. He claimed that the only damage they did was to the young trees and shrubs, and what lover of nature would make a kick about a few deer.

We now have hundreds of deer in this vicinity which excepting for the ones which strayed in from southern Wisconsin are descendants from the ones owned by Mr. Stevens at the turn of the century.

OLD CUSTOMS:

EASTER HAM AND BREAKFAST BACON
By Hazel M. Hyde

Matt Beebe's story "Pete the Pigman" in Yankee Magazine, February 1982, triggered my interest in butchering for a second round and I've quoted somewhat loosely some of the information he gave.

It is inevitable that I should be concerned in the subject when my nephew, Frank Whitney and his father Clifford E. have two fine modern pig houses. I listen to tales of woe if electricity goes off in very cold weather, when they get 2,000 baby pigs. How can I eat the superior type ham, so tasty and tender, processed from their own hogs at the

Seward Processing Plant and stored in freezers and not think of earlier practices. I can remember "the runt" pig that was mine to feed and lavish attention on and my sorrow when it was time to ship it out. My father engaged in buying swine "in transit" and fattening them for the Kansas City market. This market was much like that of Chicago, with its high stock yards. Re-read in Nuggets of History, Hyde, "Save Everything But The Squeal," Vol. III No. 3, Summer 1976, for an account of slaughter houses and meat markets. The Whitneys now raise mixed breeds for market rather than pure bred Duroc swine.

A pig is shot before it is stuck. Then the so-called sticking is done by cutting the jugular vein to drain blood from the body. It takes a skilled shot to kill the animal quickly, accomplished by hitting a very small spot in the forehead that is about the size of a thumbnail. Usually the hog is barely an arm's length away. The pig is carefully cleaned. The hog may weigh about two hundred pounds.

Usually the butcher would have a helper. The pig was rolled in a scalding hot water bath. Some kind of winch was used to lift the pig from the bath and further clean it. The hair not loosened by the water was singed off.

The cleaned, shiny white carcass hung upside down. Two hooks had been inserted behind the ligament of each heel. A very sharp knife was used to make the first incision. This was a cut in a straight line down the backbone from the base of the skull to the pig's tail. Then there was a similar cut on the abdominal side. Next a circular cut around the anus freed the intestines. The sternum was divided carefully with a saw.

Kidneys, heart, and liver were saved as they were prized by many people as being very choice for eating.

The hog was sawed in half, starting at the hind end and finishing at the head. The halves were washed off with water. The animal was ready for butchering.

"A pig was made for good eating", Carney Sarversays. Animals can be raised in good conditions and killed quickly with little suffering. Animals in the wild would fall prey to predators. It's the way of nature.

And explaining some points of butchering, he said, "The knife is as sharp as a razor. A whetstone is used to keep the knife sharp. Always you keep the knife moving away from you."

You use boots of some type or waders when in the first stages of the work. Then you slosh down the place and remove the boots.

The pig was cut up the next day, allowing the body heat to escape. It depended upon the cuts wanted: Ham steaks, rolled roasts, or spare ribs. Some people wanted large quantities of sausage. Some of the larger parts were cut with a saw in pieces to be smoked. Then there were the chops which originate along the backbone. Very little meat was wasted. The small morsels were made into sausage. And, we must not forget the breakfast bacon. All of the cuts must be packaged for storage.

Our ancestors did not have deep freezers. Several ways

were used to keep the meat in good condition. In later years we canned it in a pressure cooker; but in early days there weren't such aides. There was the smoke house on nearly every farm.

Barbara Gill Burns (Mrs. Clement V.), whom I interviewed April 26, 1982: "We have been off the farm close to 45 to 50 years. But I grew up on a farm. I lived there until I was 25 or 26. Clem and I lived on a farm for awhile. Now all the butchering is done in a processing plant. Swine raising is going in for a bacon type hog, but fat hogs with much lard were raised then.

"Families usually did their own butchering. Neighbors and relatives usually came in and helped. Butchering was done back where the children couldn't watch. I've seen the carcass hanging after the insides were removed.

"I remember the steel scalding barrel and the fire under it. The carcass was dipped into the scalding water to loosen the hair. Then they used a scraper to remove hair and any dirt. The carcasses were usually strung up in the shed to cool. It must be hung up so animals would not get to it. It was strung up with a block and tackle, that I remember. They chose a day when it was cool but meat wouldn't freeze.

"My mother, Floss Campbell Gill, usually rendered the lard. Have you ever eaten Cracklings? These are the remains of the lard rendering. Some of the children had to try the crisp fried bits of meat. My, how I hated that smell!

"We kept hams and bacon put up in brine. Salt and brown sugar are used in the brine. The hams and bacon were kept in 20 to 40 gallon brine stone jars.

"The sausage was usually fried and stored in smaller crocks with hot lard poured over it. When put into a cold place, the fat congeals, covering the meat.

"Bacon is removed to a smoke house. We used maple wood or corn cobs to smoke the bacon. Hickory smoke is preferred by many but we didn't have hickory trees and we did have maples. My parents had a smoke house when they were first married in the early 1900's. Mother told me about going out to the smoke house for slabs of bacon. Amana, Iowa, is a place where they still smoke their bacon in the old time way.

"Our German neighbors, the Remer family, who came from the old country, stuffed their sausage in casings. Casings are the intestines of the hog, that were thoroughly cleaned before using. The youngest son, Louis Remer, is 86 and is still living about a mile from where he grew up".

In my own experience, there was a man named Andy Eden who butchered for many people. He chose a snappy cold day with bright sunshine usually. Butchering Day was a day of real celebration and a number of us gathered at Eden's place. The women cooked the dinner. We children were not supposed to watch the butchering but we slipped outside and peeked through fences to see what was happening. I can remember the one high piercing squeal as the pig was killed. At noon the men would eat first after washing up, using a large

enameled wash basin. Then the women ate at a more leisurely pace. Sometimes the children had a separate table where we would giggle over our own chatter or listen to talk of the elders, which we were not supposed to overhear.

In my recollections the hog butchering day ranked in importance with a farm auction sale, a charivari, one of our huge community masquerade parties, the husking bee and barn raisings our grandparents talked about, and the literary society meetings in the school house. We children played together, our mothers cooked together or brought their favorite pie to be admired, and our fathers told tall tales. Children today think of whole hogs as Hawaiian luaus or barbeques. They only know bacon in neat packages, pre-sliced. They have never seen slabs of bacon with the rind still attached. After the bacon was removed the rinds were often used to grease the old iron skillet or to add to the big iron pot of navy beans. The days described here return only in memories.

T. BARNEY THOMPSON

Scholar, Telegrapher, Minister, Newspaperman
by Elizabeth Ahlgren
(Concluded from last issue)

In an attempt to win the "war" and also to better serve the people, The Republic started The Sunday Republic on June 1, 1930, advertising that "The same spirit, same vigor and same goals, that characterize The Daily Republic will be found in the Sunday Edition."

On June 10, 1930 Mr. Thompson began his "Column Left of the Air" on radio station KFLV. This program was to be heard at 12:15 p.m., six days a week, for the next 28 years. His intent was to give listeners, in bulletin form, a quick survey of the news of the day to whet their desire to read the daily paper. He did not comment on this news as he felt that "there is nothing more interesting to human beings than what is happening to other human beings." He would interject his own editorial expression and controversial issues into his column, so that the news broadcast should be just facts.

Mrs. McCormick brought her money in behind The Republic, but only that. She gave Mr. Thompson full rein to run the paper as he felt right. The paper remained, as always, Republican but strongly liberal. In 1928 Mrs. McCormick was elected Congresswoman-at-large from Illinois, and in 1930 she won the Republican nomination for Senator. However, she was defeated in the November election by the Democratic candidate, James Hamilton Lewis.

By the middle of 1930 both newspapers were beginning to feel that this was a foolish competition. Sky-rocketing costs plus the business depression that followed the 1929 market crash made it appear that the time, money and effort that were going into the fight was senseless. On September

29, 1930, the Rockford Consolidated News, Inc., was formed of these three original papers. The Morning Star name was maintained and the evening paper became The Register-Republic. Mrs. McCormick was named president; Mr. Thompson, vice-president and editor; Fred Sterling and Roscoe Chapman as vice-presidents; E. Kenneth Todd and Russell Chapman, general managers.

In announcing this merger in The Republic on August 20, 1930, the paper promised to stay, as it had been, "a Strong,"
(Continued on page 8)

From THE ROCKFORD DAILY REPUBLIC
September 6, 1929

Rockford Republic To Broadcast News Daily Over Station KFLV



Peter MacArthur (above), manager of radio station KFLV, co-operating with The Daily Republic, will broadcast news flashes each day except Sunday from KFLV. The first broadcast will be next Monday.

independent, Republican paper; fearless and fair, fighter for every good cause." On September 27, 1930, after 41 years, the last issue of the Daily Republic was printed.

At first the papers used the Star plant on North Wyman as it had been printing two papers already and was set up for this. The papers retained the features of both and promised "All the high grade standards of the newspaper practice which the thousands of Rockford, northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin readers have come to expect in the three newspapers which have merged will be found in the two new papers."

A good share of the staff from The Republic went to The Morning Star under the leadership of John Grimes. This paper had the smallest circulation and seemed to personify the "esprit de corps" of the old Republic. Working as a team they achieved the goal of making The Morning Star the circulation leader. Ned Atcheson became the managing editor of The Register-Republic. On the whole the editorial policies remained the same though The Register was somewhat more conservative as it had been the more conservative in tone.

Rockford was one of the hardest hit cities during the depression, partly because five of its eight banks closed their doors. After the depression it was a slow process of rebuilding the economy until the pre-war boom. The coming to Rockford of the screw product factories in the late thirties did much to aid this new economy.

While operating out of the old Star plant the papers commenced building a grand new layout on the site of The Republic Building on State Street on the Rock River. This new building was opened October 9, 1932. This year was also newsworthy in newspaper history as the advent of the five-day work week for printers. This was begun in hopes of alleviating some of the unemployment.

In the early 1930's Newspaper Guilds were being formed all over the country. The Rockford Guild was one of the very earliest, chartered in 1934. In fact, it was Number five in the country, preceded only by New York, Philadelphia, Cleveland and Minneapolis. The editorial workers were eager for some kind of bargaining agent similar to that of the printers as they could see the composing room pulling ahead of the newsroom in working conditions and pay. The editorial staff received no paid vacations, had received salary cuts periodically during the depression and were forced to take one week off without pay for every nine worked. The printers on the other hand received paid vacations and soaring wages. After much organizational work the first contract was signed in 1939.

There were, of course, some reporters who did not want to join a union of any kind. These journalists took their problem to Barney, whose door was never closed to an employee with a problem of any kind. After a short time for decision, and probably a consultation with Mrs. Simms, he offered any reporter who did not want to join the union a separate contract. This stated that the reporter could always work for the paper without joining and that he would

receive all the benefits extended to the organized workers. There was, however, no feeling at any time against editorial workers whether or not they joined the union.

On July 11, 1952 Mr. Thompson received a Doctor of Human Letters Degree from his alma mater, Beloit College.

On March 24, 1952 the International Typographical Union called a strike against the Rockford Newspapers. The main contention was the use of tapes which were produced by the Associated Press to run the linotypes. This was becoming a problem all over the country and the Union decided that a test case should be made of Rockford. Mr. E. Kenneth Todd then managing editor, was prepared for the strike. He had ready a crew of tough composing room workers, some of whom, it was discovered, had learned their trade in the penitentiary. On their side the union also sent in professional pickets.

The strike was long and bitter. The newspaper staff, both printers and editorial workers, had always had a feeling of kinship with each other and the management. It was difficult for the strikers to work up the hard feelings that the Union expected. Also hired pickets were quite scornful of the "amateurs" from the striking printers and further made life difficult for them.

This strife-filled atmosphere continued until April 25, 1952, when the paper finally had to suspend operation. After thirteen days without a paper Mr. Thompson took over the negotiations personally. He felt that enough damage had been done already and that strike should be settled.

On May 8 a contract was signed with the union which officials of ITU felt would set the pattern for the whole country. The union dropped their complaints against TTS tapes and would allow them to be used. However, there was to be no reduction in the paper's labor force because the tapes were being used.

These bitter months had taken their toll of Mr. Thompson. Barney was at this time over seventy-five years old and didn't have the energy or fight of his younger days. The paper was a second family to him and the nastiness of the strike was as hard to take as a family feud.

On October 29, 1952, it was announced that E. Kenneth Todd had bought the majority stock in the papers. Henceforth the corporation would be known as Winnebago Newspapers, Inc. Mr. Todd, who had been in the Rockford Newspaper business for 30 years, was named president and publisher. Mr. Thompson became Editor Emeritus and was to continue to write his daily column.

Barney continued to broadcast "Column Left of the Air" over the paper-owned station WROK, until June 7, 1958. On this date, after 28 years, Mr. Thompson signed off the air. At this time he was presented a plaque which read:

"To T. Barney Thompson, dean of Illinois Newscasters, in recognition of "Column Left of the Air" 1930-58, for your outstanding work as a pioneer in radio journalism. We thank you on behalf of a grateful community"

Radio Station WROK

On January 20, 1967 Barney celebrated his 91st birthday with 100 guests at the News Tower. He remarked at this time, "It is one of the blessings of longevity which can sometime become a somber business, to have contact with old friends, and younger people who are still in the main stream of newspaper activity."

He was stricken with a heart attack at his desk in the News Tower on August 29, 1967. His last column which appeared in the August 30 paper told of a conversation with a friend during which Barney reported, "I am not afraid of dying, only curious of what is coming. I am intrigued in anticipation of what I shall see that I have not seen, of what I shall know that I have not known."

Barney Thompson, scholar, telegrapher, minister, newspaperman, died September 7, 1967.

What kind of man was Barney Thompson? What kind of a newspaper man would a preacher make? Barney was the kind of "elderly" gentleman who at 80 could say, "Work is my recreation" and at 86 that he has no special plans for his birthday because he is "too busy".

Mr. Thompson never learned to use a typewriter. Until the last he wrote his column five days a week in the precise telegrapher's handscript that he learned long ago. His was the only copy which went to the linotype in this manner. Barney said that the noise and mechanics of his pick-and-peck typing interfered with his thought processes. He found instead that his thoughts were at the end of his pen. While he talked to anyone he constantly picked up one of a myriad of scratch pads which lay on his desk, making notes--for the interviewer, the editor or for his column.

Mr. Thompson was always a courtly gentleman. Mrs. James Reed, who applied to Barney for a job of cub reporter in the early 1930's reported that he rose when she entered and extended to her the very same courtesy that he would have given the local society leader.

His employees agreed that he was most stimulating to work for. Not only was his door always open to his staff, both literally and figuratively, but he stood behind them 100%. One time a reporter had written a story based on the words of an influential civic leader who later wished he hadn't expressed himself so vocally. The man stormed into Barney's office breathing fire and demanded a retraction. "Well _____," said Barney, "Did you say that?" "Yes," was the reply, "But I didn't think you'd print it." At this point Mr. Thompson told him in no uncertain terms that he would never censor his reporters for telling the truth.

Barney was liberal with both praise and criticism. While always kind, never cruel, he demanded the utmost in performance from his staff. He felt that there was a right and a wrong way to do everything and that the reporter should do it the right way.

Barney liked to have newsmen from Rockford who knew the town. He would find a bright high school boy and offer him summer work while he went to college with an eye toward a permanent place on the staff. It was his boast that he



Home of Barney Thompson, 1121 Cosper Place

built his organization from within. His formula for developing an editorial staff was to give a young, untrained worker a start, mold him patiently and gamble on the results. Each staff member was made to feel a personal part of the organization. This helped to produce low turn-over and continuous service.

When Mr. Thompson left the ministry, he brought something new and honest into the journalism profession; his ability to select the appropriate word to simply express his thoughts can be traced back to his ministerial training. The churches of the early 1900's had no speaker systems so ministers had to speak in short, simple words which were easy to say and hear.

Opposing politicians learned to fear and hate him and so tried to hit him with ridicule. However, with tolerance and logic he could eloquently turn them aside. His attempt to be fair-minded is shown in a "Column Left" of June 26, 1933. Barney was praising the fact that the Democrats had won the top state jobs but he felt called upon to add "While Republicans have ruined and ruled the state, both crowds are evil when they have their own way."

He could be very sly when it came to getting his own ideas across, to the point of being called "cunning" by those on the opposite side. His column toward the end of his life became non-political in nature, but he managed to interject his feelings in subtle ways, even when he didn't agree with the newspaper's policy. This situation became more and more frequent after he gave up control.

Barney loved all the outdoors but most especially Rockford and the Rock River Valley. It was a great personal tragedy to him that Rockford's beautiful elm trees fell victim to the Dutch elm disease. He felt that Rockford, first called the Forest City by the New York Tribune in 1853, looked too much like a big, cold city denuded of its trees. Barney always wanted Rockford to stay a small friendly town in its outlook and appearance.

Mr. Thompson's advice to aspiring reporters was "Be simple, direct and brief." To this he would add, "There isn't anything more interesting than simple human facts. The more simply they are stated, the larger is the reading circle."

Radio and television had their effect on papers and re-

porters, according to Barney. These electronic media brought the immediate on-the-spot news, creating the need for interpretation of the event in the paper.

He had no nostalgia for the paper boy shouting "Extra", however. He said that they never did make enough money to pay their way.

The old days when the newspaper office was the center of excitement are gone too. Large bulletin boards outside the office would announce the baseball scores and the election returns and were avidly watched by all. As Barney put it, it used to be that everyone would stop him on the way home and say, "Hi, Barney. What's news?" After the arrival of the electronic media they would tell him what the latest scoop was on the radio or television.

Two quotations from people who meant a great deal to Mr. Thompson and worked closely with him sum up the Rockford newsman. These words were spoken at a banquet held January 7, 1939, honoring Mr. Thompson after 25 years as an editor.

Mrs. Albert Simms called him a "First class fighting man....humanitarian....setting the pace for each and every one of us, always with fairness and kindness."

Mr. Russell Chapman, at that time vice-president of the company and co-founder of the Morning Star, spoke of his "Kindly influence and desire to be just....preaching yet the gospel of right living, right thinking to the people of Rockford."



First Congregational Church, located at 607 Walnut Street between South Third and Kishwaukee Streets; now the home of Masonic Cathedral Lodge. Barney Thompson was pastor of this church 1909 - 1913.

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