

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

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## VANDALS IN THE CEMETERIES By Margaret Burrows Eldridge

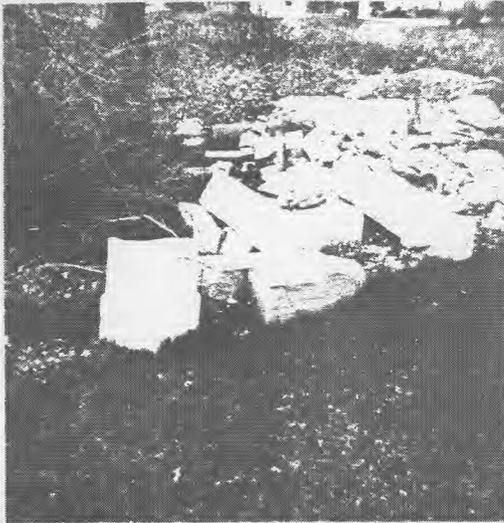
Vandals are those people who willfully or ignorantly destroy, damage, or deface property belonging to another or to the public. Some young people or even adults consider it as a sport to vandalize public property. Within recent years, groups of disorderly people have invaded cemeteries at night. They have turned over family headstones and monuments and seem to consider it only a prank. What they don't consider when they break stones and scatter them about is that they are destroying more than just property with a monetary value. Some of the stones belong to families where no living relative can replace or repair the stones. Some monuments are works of art with hand-carved decorations, executed by craftsmen with great labor and skill. Very few people now possess the skill to make such delicate and beautiful hand-carved work.

One of the chief values of cemetery stones is the genealogical data that may not exist in any other place. Even in the early 1900's Winnebago County did not make a record of all deaths. The birth and death dates might have been recorded in a family Bible but in the 1800's people were still migrating and sometimes the Bible with its records was lost. Fires destroyed houses and with a bucket-brigade to fight fire, little was saved of a family's belongings.

Not every person who has worked in cemeteries can be mentioned. Some persons who have had long-time records of such work are Mrs. Harold Pedersen, Miss Faithe Armstrong, Mrs. Florence Vaccaro, Mrs. John Dirksen, Mrs. H.H. Carlin, and Mrs. Chester Newburg. More recently Mrs. Bertha Wallblom is such a worker.

Examples could be told of the lack of respect for the deceased. People forget that the person whose grave they see or whose inscription they may read once lived and was loved by their family. Two stones have recently been returned to the Rockton Cemetery. They belong to the Talcott family and are stones for Sylvester Talcott and the Talcott triplets. They cannot be reset until money is made available for the work, either by the family or an interested party. The Cemetery Board itself does not have the funds to provide this service. The sheriff's department took a stone found along a railroad track near the Ledges to George Tillet, sexton of Rockton Cemetery. The name on the stone is Henry T. Jenkins, died November 1, 1892, age 49 years. So far it cannot be learned where its proper place may be. There is a Henry Jenkins buried in Roscoe Cemetery and it is possible there could be a relationship.

When Cedar Bluff Cemetery was reported the victim of an enormous amount of vandalism with cost of a possible repair running into thousands of dollars, many citizens were



Broken stones at Cedar Bluff which could not be repaired and remain in piles at the west end of the cemetery

shocked. The Rockford Register-Star had several articles about the damage. Some owners of the lots are presently out of work and can ill afford to spend money on replacing family tombstones. Beautiful spiral monuments six to eight feet high were knocked over. Cement urns were demolished and bits thrown about in the grass. Just cleaning up the broken pieces is a tremendous chore.

An example of the best possible display of community spirit amazed John Gordon who is caretaker. He has spoken of his appreciation of Rock River Auto Recycler of 2703 Failund. The concern owned by Melvin Worley is donating a tow truck and a boom truck to move the heavy stones and clean up debris. Fragments of rock must be cleared away. Others who offered their services included Scandinavian Cemetery Association, Fred C. Olson Mortuary, Julian Poorman Mortuary and Forest Hills Monument Company. Jim Chamberlain is donating his time in placing stones back on bases. Broken stones must be matched with the pieces that can be found. Sometimes only dates can be found and the names are scattered at some distance. Other stones are so broken and disfigured that they are unreadable.

Rockford Chapter DAR members have been walking the cemeteries for years but have not completely finished copying inscriptions. Taylor Decker copied data from many stones in Winnebago County Cemeteries. North Central Genealogical Society has recently engaged in copying records from stones. The Church of the Latter Day Saints copies cemetery inscriptions. But even with these efforts, much history will be lost before the job is completed. Hazel Hyde and Taylor Decker published some cemetery records of the cemeteries in the county.

Other cemeteries have been visited by vandals. Greenwood Cemetery custodian reported a huge amount of damage. Phillips Cemetery had an unpleasant experience. Rockton



More broken stones at Cedar Bluff Cemetery

Cemetery reported cars driving through the cemetery knocking over stones.

Mrs. Arvel Eldridge, an ardent worker in copying information from stones recalls an old abandoned cemetery named The Old Grout Cemetery, located on Tower Road, across from a razed church bearing the same name. Some bodies were moved to another cemetery but many did not have stones. Some bodies had disintegrated and there was nothing to move. The place is now a cornfield.

In the Union Guilford Cemetery there were about two dozen stones buried deep in the ground. An Enoch family stone, for example, was carefully brought to light from where it had been buried under about four inches of sod. This was a family that settled very early in that vicinity. Funds are being sought to reset these stones.

One legend that is told concerns a child 10 mo. 10 ds. The James Wright family was traveling west in 1855 when their son Charles died. The child was buried in Rockton Cemetery, and after they established a home, they sent back money to have a wrought iron fence built around the small grave. In a very small section of the Rockton Cemetery ninty-nine graves of babies and paupers were recorded in the cemetery book, but only five markers are standing. This section runs next to the mill race, a favorite fishing spot. The fisherman are unaware of the graves below the path they take to get to the fishing waters.

Many cemeteries do not keep a list of the names of people that are buried, but rather have a listing of names of lot owners.

Respect for property and a good attitude toward the places set aside for the deceased are virtues that children

should learn. Should a community tolerate vandalism? Is there some remedy for this growing problem?

WHY A DUCK?  
by Hazel Mortimer Hyde

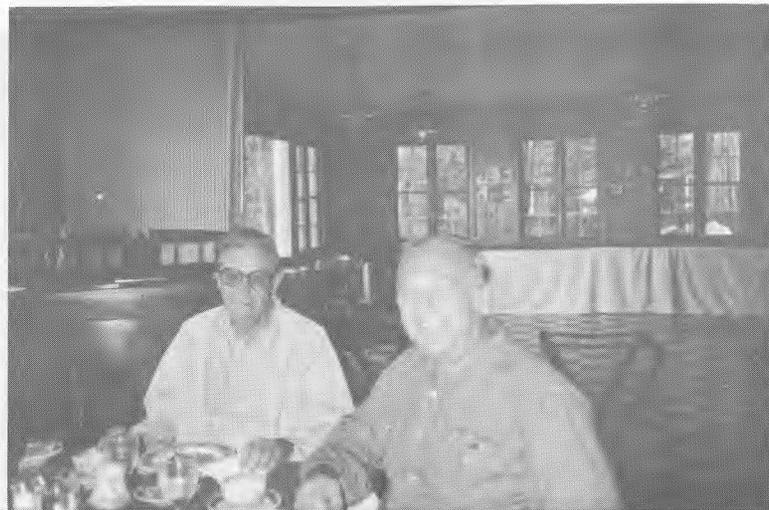
A vivid recollection of my childhood was the time I would go to Uncle George and Aunt Ella Mortimer's farm. Among the several kinds of fowl they raised were ducks. The ducks would swim along the creek and down by a railroad track. We would walk along Rock Creek and start them back toward their home place. You didn't have to drive them all the way -- just head them back in the right direction. They delighted me and I was charmed by their "Quack, Quack, Quack." I always called it "duck talk".

Families with children and many interested adults drive out Trask Bridge Road beyond the bridge a mile or so to a field with a small lake. The ground is fairly covered with geese in a field there when it is the migration season. They are fed there regularly by the owner, Bill Howard, of the Rockford Blacktop Company. Near sundown is the best time to view the birds flying in, sometimes in V-formation and other times in smaller groups or single birds. It compares to Horicon Marsh in its local appeal. The correct time of year to go is when you begin to see the V-formations in the air or hear them during the hours before sunup.

From the window of our cabin at Dillman's Resort, on White Sand Lake, Lac du Flambeau, Wisconsin, we have been looking down on the water. This morning I heard the first loon and learned that a pair of loons are still in this bay, although some have started their migration. My stay is almost too brief, for water fowl have always intrigued me. We came here for the creative arts workshop but our interest in nature has been deeply stirred.

My father, Wilson Shannon Mortimer, was a hunter and a fisherman. My mother, Ida Powell Mortimer, was a nature lover and the two of them taught me to recognize many animals, flowers, trees, waterfowl by their common names. Ducks were a very special interest.

Lacking a boy in the family, I went duck hunting with my father. We would crawl up through the long grass of the small lakes or ponds and sight the ducks or sit hidden until a flock came in. Early morning or late evening seemed to be the best times. In the narrow neck of the lake seemed to be a favorite feeding place. The most common seemed to be the mallard, the canvas back, and the teal. I got a small paperback with ducks described and the various ducks illustrated in color. Canadian geese occasionally wandered into our vicinity. My father would grow a little impatient that I wanted to watch the wild fowl swim and listen to the "Qua-qua-qua," I called duck talk. His sportsmanship would not allow him to shoot them while they were "sitting ducks" so he would finally disturb them. He never killed more than we could eat and in the days when I was very young, freezer



Harold Hyde having dinner with Richard (Dick) LeMaster,  
Author and Noted Carver of Waterfowl

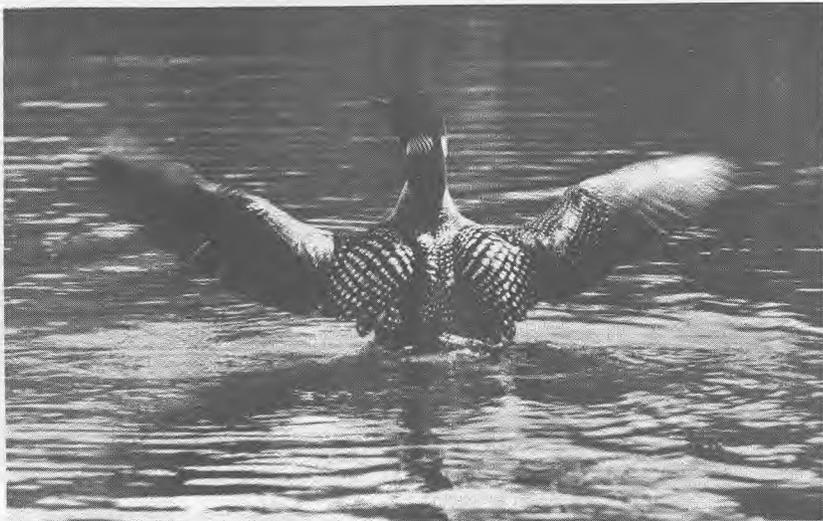
units were practically unknown. We did have a large refrigerator in our general store, but not enough space to keep extra ducks or other game.

When I started painting for self development and enjoyment, some of my first oil painting was water and mallards. Here on the walls of the main lodge are many paintings of ducks. The Powwow Room has enlarged photographs of loons, geese, and ducks. This is really on an Indian reservation of the Chippewa Indians. This morning I talked with Dan LaBelle, an Indian guide. We fell into conversation about waterfowl.

Yesterday I met Dick LeMaster, who will be holding a creative workshop October 10-16 entitled Carving & Painting Realistic Waterfowl or (Wildlife in Wood). This workshop will place the emphasis on painting realistic ducks. It is a short course in waterfowl anatomy, attitude and feather structure. It's an in-depth course in painting, techniques, color and structure of waterfowl. Carving will be minimal as the thrust will be toward painting and anatomy. Presentations will be augmented with a double screen slide viewing, to assist the participants in their own carving and painting.

Dick is presently living in Chillicothe, IL., but has lectured in many states and is sought after as a demonstrator in his field. Dick has authored two books: "Wildlife in Wood" (which has been quoted as a Bible in duck quarters). "The LeMaster Method of Waterfowl Identification" (a revolutionary way to identify waterfowl at a distance and at hand). He has been honored at Leigh Yawkey Woodson Museum as one of the world's leading bird artists. He's been studying waterfowl intensely for 11 years and has over 20,000 photographs of ducks taken in controlled conditions from which he works.

An interview with Mr. LeMaster, who wants to be called



A loon on Dillman's White Sand Lake

Dick, on October 10 in the lobby revealed a great deal more about his knowledge of ducks. I told him about Rockford's Mr. Albert Forsell, who carves ducks, and exhibits them. Dick allowed me to take his newest book and read from it. His newest, 1982, book is Decoys. The Art of the Wooden Bird. He told me that decoy making is an original North American folk art. It dates back many centuries from the decoys woven from reeds by the Indians.

When the first carved duck was placed above a fireplace, a new phase of an old art was born.

Ducks are an historic part of Rock River from their earlier days of super-abundance when only a few white people lived in the area now Rockford. Winnebago Indians were the chief residents, especially around the area near the present Hononegah Forest Preserve but Pottawatomie Indians lived along Rock River around Grand Detour. We must remember there was no boundary where Wisconsin and Illinois states adjoin. Chippewas and other tribes tended to inhabit the land in the more Northern state.

Even in our present time when people ride on the Forest City Queen operated by the Park District, the ducks are very much in evidence. Some of them have become "little beggars" expecting a "hand-out". They are really wild ducks, mostly mallards, but exceptionally tame, and they mingle with people as they gather for the boat ride and a tale of the history of the river. They frequently follow the boat for a short time.

Dick went on to tell that hunters in the field considered the effectiveness of the decoy in the water to lure the quarry close enough for it to be shot. How decoys sit in the water, how durable they were, how well the paint



A baby loon takes a ride on its mother's back

lasted, and how lightweight they could be made and the way they righted themselves when tossed in waves make up the practical art.

When so many men and women signed up for Dick's class, the Dillmans had to have two weeks of classes and divide those registered in two groups. Then Harold and I and our other two friends Bob and Camille Lindgren ate at the table with this workshop group. I took pictures of the three long tables of people who were going to learn to carve a duck for the pure beauty and artistic value of it. They were going to learn to paint so realistically or imaginatively that it could grace a mantel and people would exclaim, "How beautiful!" or "How life-like!"

Bill Hart, from Marquette, has been carving for two years. He was a high school principal seriously injured in an accident. He finds great joy in observing ducks as well as the artistry of painting and carving. They share the other half of our duplex cabin, which we will sadly leave, until next June. Their home is on Lake Superior in Marquette. Doris and Bob Nelson of Glenview, Illinois, visited with us. Their interest is both in the folk art, its history, and the artistry. I told them about Herbert L. Stoddard, Sr., Rockford's own world famous naturalist. They were quite interested in the work of Milton Malmberg of Rockford's Natural History Museum.

Albert (Bert) Forsell is one of Rockford's own carvers of waterfowl, mostly ducks and geese. His wife, Alverta says, "His skill is an inborn thing. His father was a good carver". Bert's first carving was a parrot. At first he bought a kit for birds, but he felt these birds were not true to the real appearance of the bird. He observed birds

and "made up" his own interpretation of their appearance. The song birds engaged his attention for a time. Dr. Rust, a dentist in Canfield Clinic, who died in 1949, encouraged Bert.

Wagon Wheel, Rockton, had a fine collection of carvings, Bert's sister Ella was working there as a night clerk. She procured permission for Bert to take home one duck to study in the early 50's. Bert was working until his retirement in 1970 and had little time to devote to his carving. That was the time he decided to carve ducks.

His wife, Alverta, sent for catalogs to help Bert. A friend belonged to Ducks Unlimited and introduced them to it. She saw Owen Gromme's work advertised and illustrated there and sent for a catalog.

Bert had a good selection of carvings at Kenrock Center's hobby and crafts show some years ago. That is the first time I had seen his work. Since then he has exhibited at Cherryvale Mall, at Harvard, at Y.W.C.A., and at Milwaukee. Frequently his carvings occupy a niche at a garden show. Sometimes he displays books he has purchased or pictures of various ducks along with his carvings. A man from Sabula "scolded" Bert for incorrect colors for a duck early in his exhibiting. This led Bert to study the mixing of colors in order to get the genuine color.

Other duck carvers, like Eugene Smith on Spring Creek Road, Rockford, exchange ideas. There are two duck carvers in Belleville, Illinois, who like to discuss their work with Bert.

Some years ago there was a group called "The Duck Carvers of Illinois". They were mostly around Spoon River that used to be an important flyway of ducks and geese. A daughter of one of this group is a nurse at River Bluff.

Bert said it is very important to study a live duck in order to get the details accurately in your carving. Wood ducks are a special interest for him. He doesn't try to sell his carvings because then it would become a business and no longer a hobby for him.

Rockford has a number of people interested in duck hunting. A taxidermist has prepared a fine Canadian goose which David Radtke keeps as a trophy. Generations of hunters have passed on the stories of the abundance of wild fowl in Winnebago County. The rivers were alive with them. We are in the edge of the Mississippi Valley flyway of migrating flocks of geese and ducks. We listen in the early morning hours of spring or fall for the sound of passing geese. The long V's that we can see are a thrilling sight.

When I spoke to Oakvale Garden Club one year I mentioned Owen Gromme. Alverta Scheck Forsell, a member, brought me a catalog of wild life paintings, mostly waterfowl, showing his works in color. We went to LeBlanc Gallery in Minocqua but this gallery was closed on Sunday. This world famous artist is a friend of Dick LeMaster's and is now in his 90's and still painting. He is world famous as a wild life painter.

Failing to see this gallery we went on to Amen's Gal-

lery in Eagle River. Some of his sculpture was entitled "Bluebills Coming In", "Wild Wings", "Jumping Mallard", "First Greenhead", "Chippewa Lore" or "Provider" and their bronze perfection was awe-inspiring. We could not own these precious pieces. We enjoyed the courtesy shown us as we made more modest purchases of hand-set agate jewelry. We were free to browse among wild life prints and original paintings, too.

So "Why a Duck?" Roberta Bard, a wild life artist in Eagle River said, "Every creature I paint is as individual as any person". She is deeply concerned about the future of our wildlife. Why a duck? My answer is the little children feeding the ducks on Sinnissippi Lagoon. I can hardly pass a grouping of the mallards along Rock River without stopping to watch and usually photographing them. My own mailbox has a painted duck design. Why a duck? Albert Forsell says carving a duck gives him real satisfaction. And Dave Radtke likes to see a fine duck on a platter the way Jan can cook them. Ducks are a part of our Rock River and are historically a part of the culture of a river town.

#### THE ELIZABETH FORT by Skip Schwerdtfeger

The Black Hawk War made the transitions from rumor to threat to reality with dispatch. By June of 1832 the fact that the Northwestern Frontier was ablaze was well understood. The war that started in April of that year had roots stretching back to a treaty of questionable legality and morality negotiated in St. Louis in 1804. Through a series of blunders and conspiracies the British Band of the Sauk and Fox tribes found themselves faced with the difficult choice of leaving their beloved Illinois lands forever or fighting for them. Under the leadership of an old Sauk warrior (not a chief) named Black Sparrow Hawk they chose to fight.

The white people living on the frontier reacted with combinations of fear, panic and anger. Some left for St. Louis, many gathered at the nearest large settlement, like Galena, and some chose to stay at home and defend themselves if necessary. Those hardy souls in what is now Elizabeth who decided to stay met at Laubaums & St. Vrain's Store to discuss their predicament in May of 1832.

At that discussion they talked about the Battle of Stillman's Run, now Stillman Valley, Illinois, where forty Sauk under Black Hawk had defeated 250 mounted Illinois Militia. They also worried over the Indian Creek Massacre which had taken place a few miles north of Ottawa. Fearing attack and being unwilling to leave their mines and farms, they decided to build a fort. Captain Clack Stone, the local militia leader, organized the building of a stockade to



The Stillman Valley Monument erected by the State to commemorate the death of Twelve Soldiers Massacred by Indians at that place.

be located on the fenceline of the John McDonald Farm near the stage coach road and wagon road that connected Galena and Dixon. This famous road, known as the Kellogg Trail, was the main artery north from Fort Clark (Now Peoria).

The fort was built in a day by between thrity-five and forty people. A four foot deep trench was dug forming a square with 100 foot sides. Twelve foot logs with pointed tops were placed side by side to form a stockade. Two cabins were on the back wall and two blockhouses defended the walls. After the work was done everyone moved in or near the fort and commenced to try to live a normal lifestyle. Because this area was known as "Apple River Precinct", the fort was named the Apple River Fort.

Meanwhile Black Hawk had taken his people up the Rock River to Lake Kosh Kanong in Michigan Territory (now Wisconsin). He then sent out raiding parties to attack settlements in the Lead Region to draw the U. S. Army and the Illinois Militia up from Dixon to the Elizabeth Area. That, he thought, would allow him to lead his people north and west to break out of the area by recrossing the Mississippi near present-day La Crosse. The Hawk told his people he had been instructed in a dream to attack the settlement on the river known as Moscohocoenak, or Apple River.

There had been a horse stolen near the Apple River Fort on June 17 which led to a running fight and deaths on both sides, but things seemed quiet on the lovely Sunday morning in late June when four messengers carrying dispatches from Galena to Dixon rode into the fort. As the people in the fort talked to the carriers, the Hawk and two hundred of his finest men were watching from the Flint Hill area and deciding whether or not to attack before or after the messengers departed. The messengers, all of whom had been drinking, departed the fort with a wave when one, a Mr. Welch, decided to show off a bit. He put spurs to his horse, galloped up the trail through the gap where Highway

Black Hawk



20 now passes the Flint Hills Estate sign, and ran right into the Indians making their decision. Firing broke out, Welch was hit in the thigh and unhorsed, and the battle was on.

Another messenger, a Mr. Dixon, faked with an empty gun while Welch and the other two messengers, Harkeroad and Kirkpatrick, headed back to the fort. When Dixon arrived, Captain Stone would not open the doors to let him in. Stone shouted, "How many are there?"

"I fear there are too many," replied Dixon as he galloped off down the John McDonald fenceline and, eventually, to Galena.

The Hawk divided his forces, some to gather supplies and some to attack the fort. The heavy fighting went on for about forty-five minutes during which Mr. Harkeroad, proud of his new percussion gun and anxious to show his courage, stood on the firing bench to fire over the top of the palisade instead of through the firing loopholes. Suddenly he stepped off the bench, turned, and fell over dead, a bullet through his jugular.

This rattled the people in the fort considerably. There were tears, and some talked of surrender. A tough, tobacco-chewing, hard-swearing teamster named Elizabeth Armstrong rallied the people and organized loading by the women to keep the men firing. Black Hawk decided that even with his odds, a frontal assault was not worth the loss of life. Some of his men argued for fire-arrows to burn the fort, but the Hawk did not want to draw in the Army from Dixon or Kellogg's Grove (now Kent) with a column of smoke. So they gathered their spoils and moved off down the Kellogg Trail.

Dixon, haveing reported to Col. Strode in Galena, just kept going. Strode, figuring everyone at Apple River Fort

was dead anyway, and not wanting to tangle with a major force of Sauk Indians, was slow to mount a relief expedition. When he did, he appointed dual commanders. One of the commanders shot and wounded the other in an argument over who should have supreme command while on the way here. After a thirteen hour period in the fort the brave citizens of what is now Elizabeth were relieved. As they were coming out of the fort, the last Indian attack in Illinois history was taking place as Black Hawk and his men were sweeping down on Kellog's Grove (now Kent, Illinois).

The war ended after two more major fights near La Crosse when the British Band of Sauk and Fox were defeated and slaughtered at Bad Axe. To celebrate, a cannon made of lead was fired at Apple River Fort. It exploded, doing great damage.

Famous people passed through Elizabeth during these signal days. Future presidents Zachary Taylor and Abe Lincoln, and a future great general, Winfield Scott, all were there at some time. The old trail is now the Hoppe and Dawe driveway out by the Senior Citizen Housing Complex. Nothing is left of the fort, and Harkeroad's grave is unmarked, although it is known that he was buried with military honors near the fort.

#### MRS. DEBES SEES HER PICTURE

When Mrs. Charles Debes, 1414 Browns Hills Road, turned to the back page of the last issue of NUGGETS OF HISTORY, she was surprised to find a picture of herself as a girl, sitting behind the wheel of a "Model A" Ford roadster which she had won in a contest. Little Phyllis Reinert was too young to drive, so her father, Herbert C. Reinert, traded in the "Model A", plus their old family car, on a nice new Essex sedan. Mrs. Debes says that when she was old enough to take the wheel herself, Mr. Reinert was never reluctant to let her use the Essex when she needed it.

The article in the September 3, 1929, issue of ROCKFORD REPUBLIC listed the Reinerts' address as 816 Rome Avenue, but their correct address was 816 Paris Avenue. Mr. Reinert was secretary of the Rockford Police Department. In 1930 the family moved to 1556 Crosby Street.

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