

Nuggets of History

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TWO EARLY BLACK FAMILIES

By Hazel M. Hyde

February is traditionally "History Month" because of the birthdays of Abraham Lincoln and George Washington. In 1985, it has also been declared "Black History Month". It is especially appropriate that Black History month contain Lincoln's birthday.

In 1865, Peter Blakely, a former slave, came to Rockford, Illinois. He was twenty years of age and a Civil War Veteran. Knowing that land in Wisconsin was given by the government after the Civil War (often called the War Between the States), to Black people who were formerly slaves, an effort was made to learn if any of Rockford's Black settlers had received land in this way. Peter Blakely was a native of Charleston, South Carolina, where he had run an underground railroad north from his plantation home in 1861. (See: "Journey Toward Freedom" (for information about a nearby underground railroad station) by Shelley Gucciardo, student writer, Vol XI No 5, September-October 1974, pp 2-3). He joined General George McClelland's troops after recovery from a wound sustained at Antietam in 1862. Like many others he gained his freedom in 1863 by virtue of the Emancipation Proclamation of President Abraham Lincoln, according to Rockford-Register Star February 4, 1985.

September 29, 1984, in an interview with the former Mildred Purdy, daughter of George Purdy I inquired about the Black man Jessie Robinson. He was a highly respected chauffeur for her mother Frances Borden Purdy, who had lived in Chicago before she had married. At the same time he was a skillful gardener. As Mrs. Purdy grew older and her health became poor there were nurses and practical nurses, but she much preferred the care of Jessie Robinson as a male nurse. He stayed by day and helped her.

Fannie Blakely was his wife's maiden name and he had learned much about nursing in caring for her when she was ill. He bathed and fed her. Nurses reported he was very good with children.

At the Purdy home Jesse mowed the lawn among other duties and was much loved by the Purdy children. Gordon, called Gordy, had a toy lawnmower and followed behind Jesse as he worked. Other children were young Leslie and Duncan. Eugene Blakely Robinson was Jessie's son, an only child. On South Main the father pointed out a farm and said he had come there to work. Records in the Winnebago County Court House might show if he owned land.

Peter Blakely pointed out to Mildred a farm at Highcrest and Spring Creek at the triangle and told her he came there to work. Peter, another well thought of Black man, was the butter and vegetable man for people on National Avenue. He came down National Avenue to the Purdy home with his horse and wagon. Arthur and Harry (a musician later) would



Mayor John McNamara addressing "Black Women in the Midwest" Workshop

come along. Mr. Blakely would drop down a weight to hold the horse as he made his deliveries. Harry would go to nursing homes when he was older and play for the people there. Arthur became a chauffeur. Florence did fine ironing of damask table cloths and delicate items. Fannie was elected to the library board at the last of her life. (End of data given by Mildred Purdy Geddes.)

Constance Carmichael Lane and Harriett Blakely Treadwell assembled an excellent section, Chapter 8, pp 147-167, "From Slavery to Role in Community", in WE THE PEOPLE OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY edited by C. Hal Nelson, Winnebago County Bicentennial Commission, Published 1975. Some of the information given concerns the Blakely family.

Harriett Blakely is the granddaughter of pioneer Peter Blakely. She graduated from Central High School in 1936, earned a B.S. Degree from Central State University, Wilberforce, Ohio, in 1942, followed by graduate work at Rockford College, University of Illinois and Northern Illinois University. She taught twelve years at Kishwaukee School, and was then appointed Instructional Consultant for the Rockford Public Schools. Harriett Blakely Treadwell is a member of Allen Chapel, AME Church, founded in 1891, which had as one of its founders Peter Blakely. Harriett placed the location of the Blakely truck farm on Starkweather Road.

There were five children in the family of Peter and Hattie Blakely and they made their first home at 715 George Street, later named Woodlawn Avenue. The family attended Court Street Methodist Church before he and five others left that church to form Allen Chapel African Methodist Episcopal Church. In 1908 the Blakeleys moved to Stark-

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weather Road. He sold much of his produce at Shumway Market near Midway Theatre. They lived to celebrate their sixtieth wedding anniversary.

Mae Blakely opened a curtain shop with Jessica Treat. Fannie was well known for her musical talents. Florence was organist at Allen Chapel church for forty years. Arthur was a skilled mechanic and chauffeur. Harry organized his own band.

Mayor John McNamara attended the "Black Women in the Midwest" workshop held in Booker T. Washington Center. He made a proclamation setting aside January 4-5, 1985, as Black Women in Midwest weekend. This acted as a spur for me to complete the article concerning the Robinson and Blakely families. More attention should be given to the contributions of Black people in Rockford.

Although Black History was not a part of the usual Junior High School Curriculum, Clifford Scott and I taught it as a history unit for several years at Washington Junior High School. We purchased recordings of stories of famous Black people, purchased magazines and books for the reading table, made an outline of study, and had the children interview the Black teachers in our building, search for places to write about such as Black churches, Underground railway stations, and Booker T. Washington Center. A scrapbook of these writings was put together by a committee of students.

There are many other families that might be featured for their service to this community. Following the workshop, we who attended were fired with new enthusiasm to search out the records of Rockford's Black citizens.

HISTORY OF ROCKFORD'S CIVIL WAR STATUE AND MINI-PARK by Richard G. Bergman, Major USAF Retired

Dedication of the Civil War soldier's statue and Mini Park at the corner of Main and Auburn Streets, scheduled for May 24, 1985, commemorated what is believed to be the fifth move of this statue, reputed to be over 100 years old.

For 90 years, starting in 1877, this infantryman, dressed in a long overcoat and cape, square-toed shoes and Union hat, with musket, stood on a high pedestal in the center of a spray-type fountain in front of the old Winnebago County Courthouse in Rockford.

A 1939 news story in the then-named Rockford Journal said the infantryman, according to assistant county supervisor T. W. Evans, was listed in an 1877 news item as originally standing guard over a cannon and pile of shells in a Rockford park and being moved to the old courthouse location that year. The same news item said another assistant supervisor recalled having seen the soldier in Haskell Park when he was a boy. However, the Rockford Park District has no record of this.

A well-researched article in a 1970 edition of "The



Statue of Civil War Soldier on its New Base at the Northeast Corner of North Main and Auburn Streets

Clipper", newsletter of the National Society of New England Women, said the G.A.R. (Grand Army of the Republic) Auxiliary had the statue placed in the Winnebago County Courthouse square in 1877 at a cost of \$100. Question: Was this statue formerly in the park or was it another they bought? Did they conduct dedication ceremonies?

When the courthouse was torn down in 1967, the infantryman was relegated to sentry duty outside the Winnebago County Highway garage on Springfield Avenue. The Public Building Commission, which at that time maintained the present courthouse, had it placed in the foyer after the building was completed in 1970.

Vandals broke the musket, and the Building Commission had it soldered. Vandals also desecrated his body with graffiti. This abuse ended in 1975 when the Rockford Colony, National Society of New England Women, had an enclosure made of safety glass placed around him. They also set at his feet a plaque inscribed in part: Well done -- "Good and Faithful Servant", and conducted dedication ceremonies.

Moving the statue outdoors in 1984 and development of a mini-park at the corner of Rockford's Main and Auburn streets came about because the Main and Auburn Business

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Association (MABA) desired to improve appearance of the area.

Landscape architect Daniel Lindberg made the plans and sent out the bids, with Rockford Blacktop getting the construction contract and a subcontractor doing that work. The musket needed additional work, with broken and missing firing mechanism parts, and strengthening needed for both it and the statue. Gene Horvath, a Rockford artist, did necessary research for the musket and had repairs made, as well as strengthening and renovating it and the statue. He stated that chemical analysis showed it was made of zinc and estimated it weighed between 500 and 1,000 pounds.

According to Ray Nihan, a Lieutenant (jg) with the U. S. Navy in World War II, Main and Auburn Business Association Statue-Park Committee Chairman, the statue and park reflect the area's history when the former Camp Fuller was located nearby. Rockford area volunteers camped here on their way to Civil War battles.

The mini-park on which the statue is located was provided on a long-term lease by the Greenwood Cemetery Association. Rockford's Park District takes care of maintenance. The MABA group contributed \$1,000 for electricity for the two floodlights that provide nighttime illumination for the statue and adjacent flagpole where the Stars and Stripes flies.

The soldier stands on a circular, three-tiered base atop a section of a Corinthian column saved when Rockford's old public library was remodeled, his head 18 to 19 feet from the ground. Inscription at the base reads: "A TIME-LESS TRIBUTE TO EVERY SOLDIER".

According to Barton Lander of Rockford's Community Development Department, the contractors were paid \$31,865. Of this, \$11,258 came from the War Memorial Fund administered by the city from sale of Camp Grant grounds and buildings after World War II, and the rest from Federal Block Grant funds obtained from the city of Rockford. Another \$600 was provided by the Walter R. Craig American Legion Post No. 60 for the flagpole and flag. Park benches and the fence separating this area from the cemetery were gifts of other organizations as well as Dr. and Mrs. S. L. Heuer in honor of their son.

Dedication ceremonies planned for November 9, 1984, were cancelled because of inclement weather. Included in the spring 1985 activities scheduled to start at 1 p.m. on May 24 was a brief ceremony commemorating remains of a Civil War soldier buried at the base of the statue, the ceremony to consist of short presentations by children from P.R. Walker, St. Peter's, and Welsh schools about the patriotic participation of Rockford citizens in the Civil War, World Wars I and II, and the Korean and Vietnamese conflicts and the historic significance of the area. Also included: P.R. Walker school choir, introduction and recognition of those who contributed by MABA Statue-Park committee chairman Nihan, the playing of taps, and a rifle salute by the Marine Corps League, Viet Now, and Camp Fuller.

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CHRISTENING ROBES
By Hazel M. Hyde

The modern baby has been freed from swaddling clothes. His comfort is of first importance. But one of the old-time usages is still practiced in some families. The family christening robe is kept to be used on the occasion of the baptism of several generations of babies.

A christening robe is usually very long, almost touching the floor when the baby is held in the arms of an adult. It had been made of very fine materials, with tiny tucks, very fine lace, and hand-embroidered designs. Much time had been expended in the dewing and decorating of the robe.

It has been over a year since an infant baptism in Court Street Methodist Church has had the baby dressed in a long christening dress, but quite frequently we have sponsors stand behind the parents. The minister always asks, "By what name shall this child be called?" The congregation pledges itself to set an example for the child. The ritual is lovely. Everyone strains to get a good view of the baby on these occasions. Most babies perform as though aware they are the center of attention. A few whimper or cry.

Christening means naming an infant, and takes place at the time of baptism. In modern times the hospital or doctor has reported the name chosen by the parents and there is a legal birth certificate, whereas in very early times the church record might be the only proof of the child's name and birth. Christening at first meant to make Christian. The custom dates back to early Christian times, when a person took a new name at the time of baptism.

Godparents or Sponsors are required by some Christian groups at baptism. Godparents promise to sponsor the child's training in case its parents should neglect it or should die. Roman Catholic law forbids baptism of an infant without a godparent, except in emergencies. The Anglican book of Prayer also provides for godparents. But most protestant churches have made the children's parent responsible for its upbringing. The position of godparent is largely one of honor. "What is honored in a country will be cultivated there". More and more parents are having sponsors stand with them when a child is baptized in Protestant churches.

The Ritual of the United Methodist Church has these words: "Dearly beloved, Baptism is an outward and visable sign of the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, through which grace we become partakers of righteousness and heirs of life eternal. Those receiving the Sacrament are thereby marked as Christian disciples..."

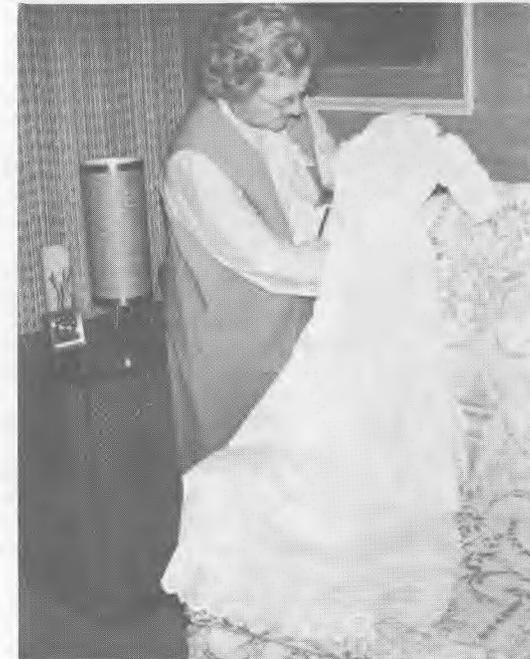
As the beautiful ceremony continues, the minister takes the child in his arms and asks,

"What name is given this child?"

The surname is omitted--only the given name is spoken.

Near the end of the service he asks the congregation to participate and vow to try to live in such a way as to

Rosemary Carrott displaying a long Christening dress that has been in the Carrott family and is probably about 75 years old.



help the child become established in the house of faith.

The christening is linked with the name by which a person will be known. Early people bestowed a name with a definite consciousness of its meaning. Most of our common or given names, often Christian names, come from Greek, Hebrew, Latin, or Teutonic tongues. The Hebrew names were largely taken from the Bible. The most common boys name was John meaning gracious gift of God; and Mary meaning bitter, was the most common girls name. From the Greek came Margaret meaning pearl; George, farmer; Patricia, noble; and Virginia, pertaining to Spring.

The Roman Catholic Church, since the Council of Trent (1545-1563) has insisted that Catholic parents give a saint's name to each child. My Aunt's Christian name was Teresa, which was the name of a saint known as "The Little Flower". One of her daughters was christened Teresa Marie. Marie is considered a form of Mary. Much could be told of names and their origins.

Christening bonnets like the long dresses were made of the finest materials such as Irish linen and the daintiest lace. Some of the oldest of these were made of Belgium lace.

The long dress for a baby's christening ceremony which is on display (see pictures) has a Rockford area history.



The Fry Twins, Children of Lowell and Dianne Fry, and Grandchildren of Pauline and Ralph Fry.

You see that it has a long panel down the front which gradually widens to give a flaring shape to the garment. Rows of lace insertion alternate with rows of tiny gathered strips of the same material as the remainder of the dress. Narrow lace on both sides of the panel from shoulder to hem gives the front of the dress a finished look. A wider band of lace with flower and eyelet pattern matching the panel completes the skirt part of the dress. The dainty, little sleeves have a band of gathered material set in from shoulder to wrist. The cuff is a band of insertion of the flower and eyelet design material finished with a turned up band of lace. The neck has a gathered ruffle of lace with a back opening. Two ties have been attached to the sides of the front panel and can be tied in the back with a large soft bow and streamers. This christening dress has been preserved in the family of Rosemary and Dennis Carratt of Rockford.

The age of this dress is not known with exact date. It is not older than the time 1846 when Elias Howe invented the sewing machine as we know it today. In 1851 Isaac Singer patented the foot-operated treadle and the presser foot which holds the fabric down. Since the

garment was made with a sewing machine that fixes the date with some approximation. Several generations of children undoubtedly used the dress, which shows that it was made with much care and love. The dress is at least seventy-five years old and if 100 years old it would have been made in 1885.

I remember the dainty hand-tatted booties my mother gave my Aunt Fanny (actually Teresa) over fifty years ago when one of her boys was to be baptized and christened in Saint Francis Xavier Catholic Church in Cherryvale, Kansas. With an effort I recall being at the christening. Uncle Fred's brother, John Bauer, and his wife Mary, were the god-parents.

Clothing had a special significance at such occasions. My own baptism was not a christening for I was about five years old. The dress I wore was all white and had lovely lace from our own general merchandise store. A special dress-maker had made me stand still while she fitted the dress on me. I always got "the prickles" running up and down my legs when we went to a dress-maker. The baptism itself occurred at the "Old Baptism Hole" in a creek, and the minister, Rev. Spangler, was very young. He held me in his arms and completely submerged me in the cool water. That's the same minister that always got the first May basket from me on May Day. He was not married and he spent a fair amount of time with my family. He talked about Northwestern University--and had a catalog sent to me when I was still very young. I didn't understand it, but I considered it "a very great gift" and it was almost prophetic because many years later I did take my Masters Degree there. Do I remember the day I was baptized? Yes. I even have a faint recollection of the crowd of people who came to the "Baptising" for several adults were also baptized on the same day.

The Fry Twins, Katherine Grace and Alexander Harrison, children of Dianne and James Lowell Fry and grandchildren of our regent and her husband, Pauline and Ralph Fry, were christened at Second Congregational Church. Grandfather Rev. Ralph Fry, officiated. Their uncle Charles Fry was the assisting deacon. The christening dresses were made of batiste with lace insertion and beading in both the yoke and skirt portions. Kathryn's dress was finished with a flounce and lace at the bottom. The puff sleeves were finished with beading and lace. Alexander's dress was finished with a deep hem. His lace bonnet had a beak, whereas Kathryn's was plain. The children were born in May of 1984. (see pictures)

Authentic pictures of long babies' christening robes can be seen in the book by Trevor Hall: Born to Be King: Prince William of Wales. I bought the book especially to have to display the pictures. (pp 11 & 18 for Prince Charles and pp 24,25,26, 27 for Prince William) For royalty the christening ritual is a beautiful ceremony. The christening of Prince William, the child of Prince Charles and the Princess of Wales took place in Buckingham Palace. The child was born on June 21, 1982 and is second

in succession to the Throne of England and when he becomes King he will be the 42nd monarch since the Norman Conquest. His day of christening was the Queen Mother's 82nd birthday. In the book you will find a copy of the official birth record. His nanny is named Barbara Barned and the doctor was George Pinker.

The duties of godparents are taken seriously by the British royal family. Prince Charles had six godparents, but it was felt that they were too old to be of real value in his formative years. So young Prince William's godparents are much younger, being:

Princess Alexandria, cousin of the Queen; Ex-King Constantine of Greece and a second cousin of Prince Charles; Lord Romsey was a representative of the Montbatten family;

Laurens van der Post, whom the prince admired in his anthropological studies;

Godmothers include the Duchess of Winchester; and Lady Susan Hussey who had coached the then Lady Diana Spencer in traditions and protocol of established royalty.

A display of christening robes and other garments worn by a member of your own family is very meaningful. Vows were taken that day which were binding upon parents to rear a child in a godly way. The garments themselves are a reminder of a holy occasion and the sacred obligation when they were worn by a tiny baby.

STEPHEN MACK DEATH IS TOLD
IN FORUM ISSUE
(from Rockford Republic,
December 5, 1922)

An obituary notice of Stephen Mack, the first white settler in Winnebago county, was not worthy of first page mention, according to Austin Colby, editor of The Rockford Forum, Rockford's first weekly publication, a perusal of the April 24, 1850, issue indicates.

The Mack story, the only one of importance to be found in the four page publication, is hidden under the illuminating caption of "Died" on an inside page. Mack, it will be remembered, came from Vermont, settled on a high bluff of land "where the Rock and Pecatonica rivers join and resided from the earliest days of our settlement until the time he yielded up his last breath".

Interesting indeed is The Forum, a copy of which was loaned to The Republic by Morton Miller, 424 N. Avon St., who recently found the old journal in his home. Editor Colton's publication was in its eighth year when the Miller copy was issued.

Old residents may recognize some of the following names, found in a directory of the court and township boards in 1850: Hugh Henderson, Joliet, circuit judge;

Charles H. Spafford, clerk; William Brown, county judge; David Weld, associate justice; William Hulin, county clerk; Hiram R. Maynard, sheriff; Aremas Hitchcock, coroner; Duncan Ferguson, surveyor, and William Hulin, Gustavus B. Eastman, Duncan Ferguson, T. L. Breckenridge, all Rockford, and Rufus Hadley, Rockton, notaries public.

The Rockford township board consisted of the following officers: Bela Shaw, moderator and supervisor; James M. Wright, town clerk; Duncan Ferguson, assessor; King H. Milliken, collector; John Fisher, overseer of poor; Charles Reed, Daniel McKenney, Harry N. Spalding, highway commissioners; King H. Milliken, George Wyatt, constables; William Brown, Isalah Lyon, justices.

An intimation of the growing feeling existing between northern and southern legislators is found in a report of U.S. senate activities of April, 1850. The following excerpt is taken from The Forum:

"...Mr. Foote appealed to the friends of the select committee to refrain from further debate. Mr. Clay's modified amendment passed, 24-22. Mr. Benton then moved the amendment previously submitted. A debate ensued. Mr. Benton addressed the senate in support of his amendment. Mr. Foote said he had endeavored to avoid discussion; he would not condescend to notice anything coming from certain quarter. He (Benton) had opposed the southern address. Mr. Foote was proceeding with sarcastic remarks when Mr. Benton throwing aside his chair, proceeded toward Mr. Foote's seat ---Mr. Dodge from Wisconsin endeavoring to prevent a collision, detained Mr. Benton, who overcame resistance and continued to approach Mr. Foote. Cries of "Sergeant At Arms!" "Order!"

"Mr. Foote drew a revolver and cocked it. The scene which followed is indescribable....This is but a faint outline of the proceedings; sufficient, however, to show the spirit pervading the senate on the vexed question of slavery."

Mail service by the old Northwestern railroad was listed as daily except Sunday from the east and west, but from northern and southern points thrice weekly was the rule. From Mineral Point, Wis., mail came on Mondays and departed Thursdays.

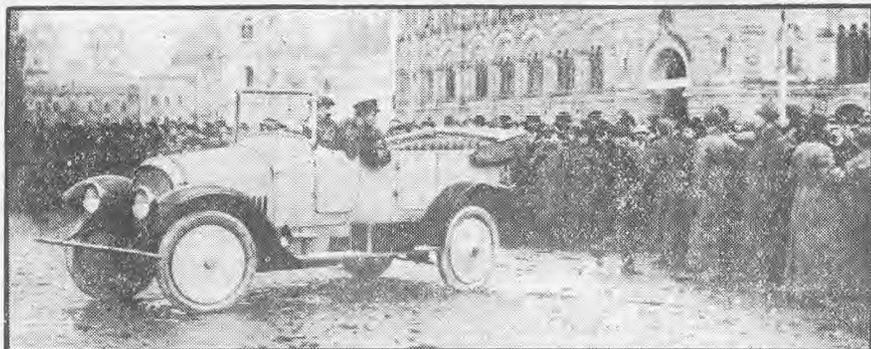
Advertisers of seventy years ago seemed to specialize in the sale of horse, cattle and hog medicine, also "good for human ailments," land grant parcels and shop products. G. Robertson, subscribers noted, maintained a "painting room" in Horsman's block, "where he was ready at all times to "attend to calls in every department of portrait or landscape painting."

Charles Bowie, located on the west side, opposite Wyman's Recess, proclaimed to all that he had A-1 Lumber for wagons and buggies at Chicago market price.

G. A. & R. A. Sanford advertised the arrival of spring ribbons from New York and "buff, pink and mode color of Chambray gingham received this day," while Anthony & Emerson's double action churns were guaranteed "to make butter from sweet milk" in five minutes.

(From Rockford REPUBLIC, December 1, 1922)

Russia Will Soon Go Flivvering



(By Pacific & Atlantic)
Soviet Russia has gone in for auto manufacturing. This photo shows first Soviet made car, which was presented to President Kalenin.

(Copyright, 1922, Pacific & Atlantic Photos, Inc.)



Harry Andreen, late treasurer and board member of the Rockford Historical Society, addressing an audience at First Lutheran Church. Mr. Andreen was in much demand as a lecturer on Rockford history and church history.

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