

Nuggets of History

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Number 4

ROCKFORD'S NAMESAKE A THRIVING TOURIST COMMUNITY Also The Home of Hush Puppy Shoes

About ten miles northeast of Grand Rapids, Michigan, along Old Highway 131, lies Rockford, begun, like our Rockford, with a dam and a sawmill. U.S. 131 is now a super highway, and by-passes Rockford two miles to the west, but there is an exit there, so Rockford is not difficult to find.

It was in the fall of 1843 that Smith Lapham, born in Rhode Island in 1804, completed his dam on the Rogue River. Unlike Germanicus Kent, who founded our Rockford by building his dam on Kent Creek, Smith Lapham did not start the building of the dam. It was begun earlier that year by a William Hunter, who had also begun building a sawmill on the west bank.

Apparently Hunter was unable or unwilling to continue the work, so he entered into an agreement with Lapham to finish the dam and sawmill in exchange for 80 acres of land near the dam. After Lapham had finished the dam, Hunter changed his mind and limited Lapham to only 40 acres. Lapham therefore took the 40 acres, forgot about completing Hunter's sawmill, and instead built one of his own on the east bank of the Rogue River.

Lapham had his sawmill in operation by the fall of 1844. By the following year his little mill was the center





Photo of Dam as it appears today. The original Dam was completed in the Fall of 1843.

of a small hamlet of several slab shanties, one log cabin, and four frame houses. As it was located almost entirely on land owned or sold by Smith Lapham, the little settlement came to be known as Laphamville.

Albert L. Pickett, a 29-year-old relative of Lapham, arrived from Vermont in 1845 to operate the Lapham sawmill. He remained all his life, dying in 1918 at the age of 102. William Hunter's sawmill was finally completed on the west bank of the river, but apparently was not as successful as Lapham's mill; the town seemed to grow eastward rather than westward. Hunter did remain for a few years but left in the 1850s. Other settlers arrived each year, however, and soon Laphamville was a thriving little community.

In 1858 the Grand Rapids and Indiana Railroad Company



150 - COULD (AND STREET) - Looking East in Main Street

Smith Lapham
1804 - 1884
Founder of Rockford
and first Postmaster



Courtesy of Rockford Public Library

began construction of a railway from Grand Rapids through Laphamville to Cedar Springs. Construction was delayed by the Civil War, but in the 1860s the grading for the railroad was approaching Laphamville. Officials of the railroad began to urge the citizens of Laphamville to adopt a shorter, less awkward name. The subject of name change was the object of many discussions about town.

One evening in late 1865 a general meeting was held to



In 1912, when this photograph was taken, Squires Street was an alley that ran along the railroad tracks. Pictured from bottom to top are the railroad depot, now the Melting Pot; the mill, now the Old Mill Restaurant; the granary and bean plant, now Buckley's Mall. The building to the left of the depot was once part of the Squires bean processing operation, and today houses the Weaver Shop.

try settling the issue. Crowding into the old schoolhouse, the citizens discussed the possibilities. Some suggested just shortening the name to Lapham. Then Rev. Volney Powell, newly arrived from Rockford, Illinois, to become pastor of the Laphamville Baptist Church, proposed the name of Rockford. Rockford, Illinois, had once been called Midway, but had eventually been named after the rocky ford in Rock River. The Rogue River also had a rocky ford where travellers crossed the river. A vote was taken, and, by a small margin, Laphamville became Rockford.

No further mention is made of Rev. Volney Powell. A history of Rockford, Michigan, written in 1967, in addition to relating that incident at the schoolhouse in 1865, shows a hotel register of March 23, 1867, on which "V. Powell" had signed, but no other reference to him. A search of the histories of Rockford, Illinois, shows no mention of a Rev. Volney Powell in connection with any of our early Baptist churches. It may be that he lived briefly in our Rockford before attending a seminary, but apparently he was never a pastor here.

Rockford, Michigan, has become quite a tourist community, with a historic shopping district known as "Squires Street Square", similar to "Cable Car Square" in Dubuque, Iowa. Most of the buildings in Squires Street Square date back to the middle 1800s, when they were warehouses, a bean processing plant, a mill, a train depot, and barns. In those days Squires Street was an unnamed alley near the river. It was later named after Ross Squires, an early merchant who dealt in beans, potatoes, and other produce. The idea of the Squires Street Square shopping district began in 1970 when brothers Mike and Tim Farmer and their wives decided to renovate an old feed mill which had been burned out and condemned. They restored the building and opened it as a cider and donut shop, using a century-old hand-operated press to squeeze the apples. Today the Old Mill is

The Rockford Hotel



The Old Mill

a combination bakery, restaurant and gift shop.

Mike Farmer next purchased eight parcels of land along Squires Street and restored more seemingly useless buildings into charming shops. From mills, warehouses, barns, and chicken coops, Squires Street Square has become an authentic remnant of the past. Another short alley, now named Squires Lane, runs southward almost as a continuation of Squires Street. There, and all around the square block bounded by Squires, Courtland, Main, and Bridge Streets are more than thirty interesting establishments.

One of the most interesting for history buffs is the Rockford Area Historical Museum, established in 1976. The building was formerly the old Power House, or generating plant, built in 1903. After newer generating facilities were provided, the city used the building for many years as a garage, service and storage building. Since 1974 it has been leased from the city for one dollar a year by the Rockford Area Historical Society and made into a museum. Located near the dam, the museum is open from May 1 to November 1 six days a week (Tuesday through Sunday), 1-3 p.m. In addition to many reminders of the past, such as old tools, toys, school equipment, kitchenware, etc., there is an 1860 room, a Victorian parlor, a 1920 office, a rural mail carrier's buggy, and a complete collection of the newspaper, Rockford Register, back to 1871 when it was first published. (Rockford, Illinois, also had a Rockford Register.)

In 1903 the Hirth-Krause leather and hide company began a shoe factory in Rockford, Michigan. The shoes produced were called Rouge Rex Shoes, identified by a trade mark of an Indian in feathered headdress. In 1909 the company built a tannery and called it the Wolverine Tannery. In 1922, Hirth-Krause Company was changed to The Wolverine Shoe and Tanning Corporation, which continued until 1966, when the name was changed to Wolverine World Wide, Inc. Their most famous product is Hush Puppy shoes, introduced (Continued on page 8)

Legend

1. Factory Outlet Mall
13 Shops - Restaurants
2. Powers Pharmacy
Gifts, Cards, Candies, Toys. 866-1066
3. The Melting Pot / O'Fudge
Roasters of Coffee & Nuts. Makers of Mackinaw Fudge, Chocolates & Cookies. Cheese. 866-2900
4. The Olive Branch
Quality international gifts. Fine jewelry, pottery, collector dolls, bears, & More! 866-9761
5. Let's Play It Again
New & Used Toys & Gifts for Children. You'll find toys for all. Affordable prices. 866-9873
6. Peace Pipe Tobacco / Fenn Valley Wine Cellar of Rockford
Tasting of Premium Wines. Wine & Beer Making Supplies & Classes. 866-1630
7. The Weaver's Shop & Yarn Company
Knitting & Weaving Yarns. Hand-woven Items. Supplies & Classes. 866-9529
8. Porter's Quarters
Chimark Pewter Sculptures. Pewter Miniatures & Collectibles. Fudge & Candies. 866-9007

9. The Old Mill
Bakery, Restaurant & Gift Shop. Riverfront Ice Cream Parlour. 866-4306
10. Cardinal Galleries
Gifts of Original Designs by Michigan Craftsmen & Cardinals! 866-9788
11. Rockford Historical Museum
Open 1:00 - 3:30. Tuesday - Sunday. May 1 - November 1.
12. Almost Antiques
Antique Reproductions. Round Oak Tables, Chairs, Curved Glass China Cabinets & Gifts. 866-9735

The Copper Pig Giftstore
Cards & Gifts for All Ages! Jelly Bellys. Open Sundays. 866-9159

Squires Street Gallery
Original Artwork. Pottery, Batik, Jewelry, Paintings. Wood. Gwen Frostic Prints & More.

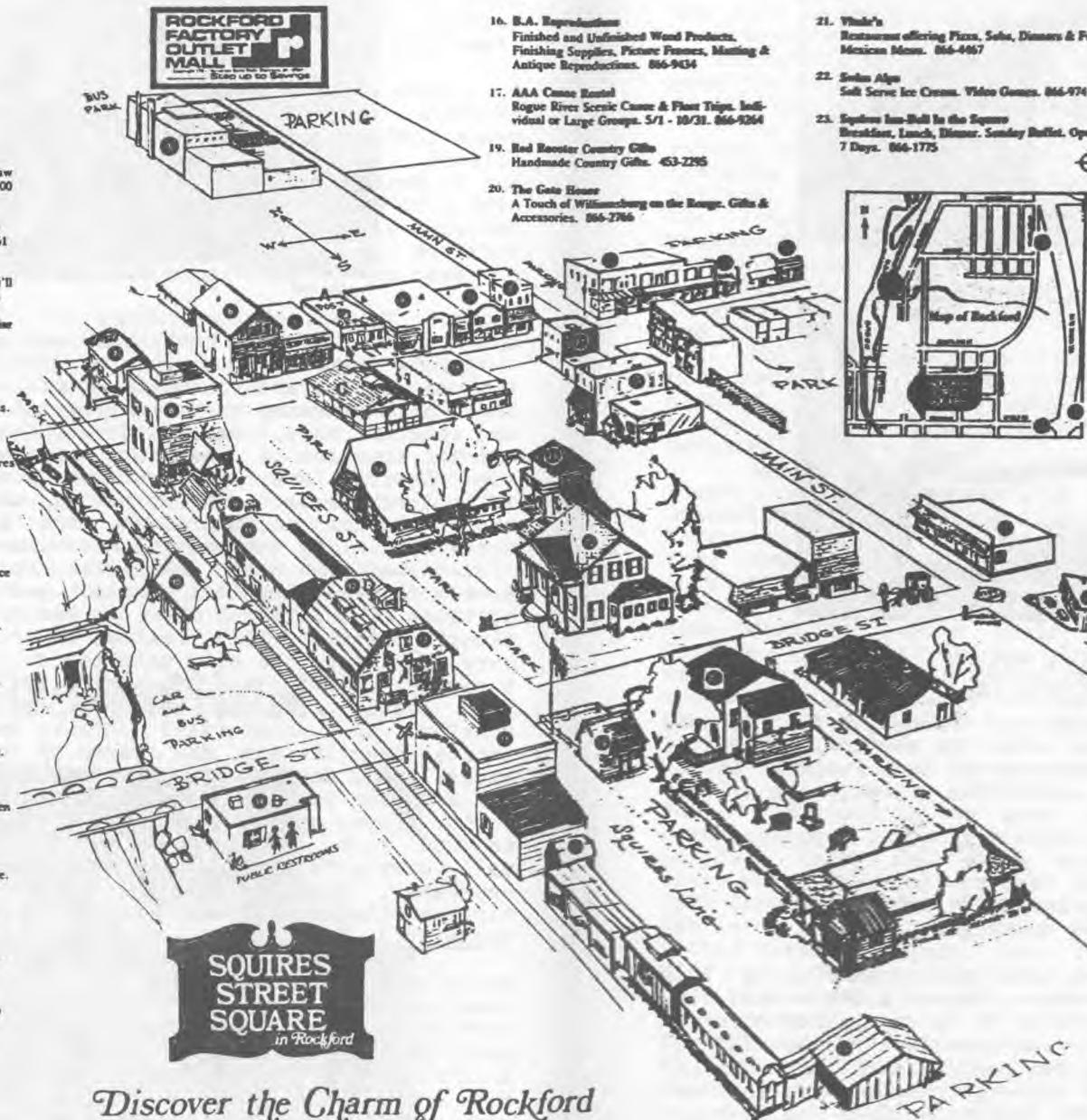
Chuck's Leather Corral
Quality Leather Many Custom-made Items.

13. Twile Is Nice
Current Fashions. Gently Used - Almost New Clothing at Bargain Prices. 866-9225

14. Green Boughe Cabinetmaker's Shop
Fine Furniture. Collectibles & Gifts. 866-2617

The Stained Glass Station
Custom Stained Glass Work. Supplies & Repairs. Classes. 866-2909

15. Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce
Public Restrooms. Information Center.



Discover the Charm of Rockford

16. B.A. Reproductions
Finished and Unfinished Wood Products, Finishing Supplies, Picture Frames, Mantling & Antique Reproductions. 866-9434

17. AAA Canoe Rental
Rogue Rivers Scenic Canoe & Float Trips. Individual or Large Groups. 5/1 - 10/31. 866-9264

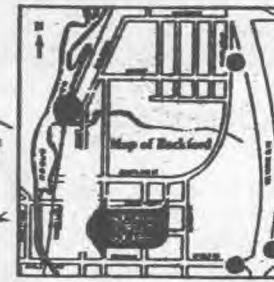
18. Red Rooster Country Gifts
Handmade Country Gifts. 453-2295

19. The Gate House
A Touch of Williamsburg on the Range. Gifts & Accessories. 866-2766

20. Vickie's
Restaurant offering Pizza, Salads, Dinners & Full Mexican Menu. 866-4467

21. Swiss Alps
Soft Serve Ice Cream. Video Games. 866-9741

22. Squires Inn-B&B In the Square
Breakfast, Lunch, Dinner. Sunday Buffet. Open 7 Days. 866-1775



23. Baskets In The Belly
Wicker, Baskets, Unusual Wares. 866-2890

Cadbury Neck
Wood, Copper, Gourmet Utensils & Co. 866-0554

The Depopique
Custom Knitting, Knitting Machines, Hand-made Clothing & Toys. 866-4031

Past Scripts
Stationery, Greeting Cards, Hello Kitty, Creative Wrapping & Desk Access. 866-1634

J.T. Stickney
Counted Cross-Stitch, Stenciling, Crocheting & Lace No Darning. 866-1634

25. Great Northern Trading Company
Enamel Ware, Antiques, Country Furniture & Reproductions. 866-9232

26. Berber 'N Rags / The Candle Shop
Old Fashioned Rug Hooking & Braiding, Candles, Pyramids, Gifts. 866-0260

27. The Corner Bar
Hot Dog Hall of Fame. 866-4534

28. Rockford Hotel
Family Dining in Turn-of-the-Century Atmosphere. Reasonable Prices. Drinks. 866-4500

29. Dees 'N One Bakery
Doughnuts, Breads, Croissants, Soup & Sandwiches. Open 7 days. 866-1486

Scars - Cross Company
Fashion Apparel & Shoes. 866-9211

31. Sports Treasures
Sportscards, Autographs, Hobby Supplies, Shirts, Hats & More. 866-0520

32. Fergo's Photo Gallery
Fast Photos & Friendly Service. Our Business is Developing. 866-0594

33. Celestial Motel
King-size Beds Available. Room Phones. Continental Breakfast. 866-1585

34. Maggs Motel
Family Restaurant offering Breakfast, Luncheon, & Dinner Menus. 866-1017

35. Judy's Restaurant
Fast Service with Breads, Desserts & Salad Bar. 866-2646

36. Rockford Phone Center, Inc.
Unique & Decorative Phones for Everyone. 866-9582

Associated Members
Independent Bank
Squires Lane Print Shop
Emergency Ambulance 866-2293
Rockford Police Dep L 866-1221

A. U.S. Post Office
B. Rockford Area Chamber of Commerce
Public Restrooms, Information Center
C. New Battery Pavilion
Exciting happenings all summer long
D. Strollers available at Twice Is Nice Boutique

Rockford Area Historical Museum



ROCKFORD, MICHIGAN
(Continued from page 5)

in 1955 and now known nationwide. Probably few people throughout our nation realize that the corporate offices and main plant of the manufacturer of Hush Puppies is located in Rockford, Michigan, which has a population of approximately 3300.

EAGLE'S NEST WAS AN ARTIST'S DREAM By Hazel M. Hyde

Wallace Heckman built a home on his land along Rock River, a few miles from Oregon. He was a lawyer and business manager for the University of Chicago, according to Evelyn R. Moore writing in a publication called HISTORIC ILLINOIS in August 1984. He had many friends and acquaintances in the University of Chicago, especially the art department, and in Chicago Art Institute (See: Vol.22 No.4, 8

Autumn, 1985, p. 5 for names of artists, sculptors, writers, composers and other professional persons with whom he associated.)

In a telephone conversation, Helen Debnan of Byron, Illinois, repeated many well-remembered stories of the Heckman estate on Rock River. Attorney Heckman had named his farm Ganymede for the classical legend. The house has been torn down. Margaret Fuller, visiting the area, enjoyed the spring on the grounds and was inspired to write the poem "Ganymede". She referred me to OGLE COUNTY BICENTENNIAL publication for more information.

One tale about the Eagle's Nest Group was that they rented the land for a camp site to accommodate tents and cottages for the sum of one dollar a year. Each year the artists, writers, sculptors and any persons visiting at the time dressed in cast-off finery as costumes and paraded to the Heckman house. One locally-recalled event occurred when James Henry Breasted was visiting. He gave a speech, to the landowner's mystification, in the Arabic language. Two persons representing slaves were manacled and led forward.

Had I noticed "The Funeral Procession", which had been constructed by art students while Taft was away in Europe? This piece of sculpture was cast in concrete and placed near the site of Taft's studio, to remain as a permanent fixture.

Mary Carolyn (Carrie) Vaughn's step-brother Charles Vaughn records, October 17, 1872, that Grandmother and Grandfather Lewis arrived from Hale, Ogle County, Illinois. Information on this Lewis family was sent by local historian, Armour Van Briesen of Stillman Valley (member of Rockford and Ogle County Historical Societies), with the comment that Carrie Vaughn evidently spent considerable time with the Deacon David Lewis family of Ogle County. Thus we know that she was in the vicinity of the Heckman estate in 1872, a few years before Attorney Heckman leased the land to the group of artists from Chicago. Incidentally Carrie lived in Chicago for a time. In September 1870, just after listing portraits of Mr. Thomas Potwin and Mrs. Thomas Potwin in her ledger she lists a painting of Eagle's Nest. In October 1876, she retouched Eagle's Nest. These paintings in the area predate the famed artists' organization, people can wonder if she knew any of these people. There has often been said in local legend that there was a real eagle's nest in the area known as Lorado Taft Campus of Northern University above Rock River. Among Carrie's portraits in those years were the Farwell family; Little Hattie, Simeon, Mrs. Simeon, Little Ruth, Pearl, Old Mr., Old Mrs Farwell, Mrs. Farwell's baby, Harry, and Ruth. Only one Farwell lives in Rockford in 1986- I. M. Farwell.

Elizabeth Dickerson, one of the "camp children" of the Eagle's Nest families who had lived in tents is quoted as saying, "Anyone interested or connected with the arts who happened to be in or near Chicago sooner or later turned up for a weekend." Was Carrie a lone painter who captured

in paint in May 1875 "A Rock River Scene", and in 1873 "Carrie's Chickens" and April 1876 "Pine Rocks" or had she studied or painted with those who came to the area to establish "Eagle's Nest Art Colony"? It is said a number of paintings of that group are still to be found in Oregon homes. Carrie did not always sign her portraits and the paintings of flowers, but it is probable that some of her work, too, may still reside in an Oregon or Ogle county or Rockford home.

Lorado Taft came to be the informal leader of the bohemians who came to camp at Eagle's Nest every summer to escape Chicago's heat. The fancy dress parties such as one at Wallace Heckman's home in 1908 for a Labor Day pageant surprised the farm people of the area. Egyptologist James Henry Breasted was visiting and wore a white turban. Mrs. Breasted's costume included an urn on her head. The Egyptian theme is reflected in a photo at the Illinois State Historical Library, which provided information about the years 1897-1942. The artists worked during these summers but others came to devote themselves to play and entertainment. Rock River and the beautiful surrounding wooded areas still offer such recreational fun as water skiing, boating, hiking, picknicking, fishing, photographing, and observing wildlife. The long-ago canoers invented games, charades, and costume parties.

November at the camp was sometimes the time of departure for Taft. His house had a furnace. He and Ralph Clarkson had studios there. Novelist Hamlin Garland, who was an Indian and western enthusiast, raised a tepee that was dedicated by naturalist Ernest Thompson Seaton. The group gathered for appropriate remarks and planned a celebration afterward. Clarkson who was a regular resident at Eagle's Nest was born 1861 in Amesbury, Massachusetts, and had a studio in Chicago (from 1896) and was president of Municipal Art Commission of Chicago. Cakewalks and dancing were the entertainment for many evenings. Taft organized one play that took about a month of preparation and was given in French. Irving Pond, who had traveled with a circus, according to Evelyn Moore, performed gymnastic stunts to please the camp children.

Tales of the Sauk and Fox Indians told around a camp fire may have stirred Taft's imagination. It was easy to imagine Indians coming back to these wooded areas. It has been stated that he contemplated the statue for some time before it began to take shape. He made at first a six-foot model that some claim was a likeness of Hamlin Garland, the writer. Taft taught for twenty-two years at the Chicago Art Institute. Taft was born in 1860 in Elmwood, Illinois, had a studio in Chicago, and according to Webster's Biographical Dictionary he exerted important influence on the development of sculpture in the Middle West. He did many portrait busts. He was nearly forty when he began spending his summers at the Eagle Nest Camp. Friends remembered that he often stood on the bluff overlooking Rock River with his arms folded. This was the pose he gave



Blackhawk Statue

the noble Indian who surveys the river and the land across from it. "Black Hawk" is the popular name for the Indian statue, although it was not given that name by Lorado Taft. One of his most famous statues is a group called "The Spirit of the Great Lakes" at the Art Institute. He apparently drew his inspiration for it from his native state and Chicago's situation on Lake Michigan.

It is fitting that the commanding figure of an Indian fifty feet high, standing two hundred feet above Rock River should honor Black Hawk, for he was born in 1767 at the mouth of Rock River in Illinois. This great Sauk Indian was noted for his struggle against the westward movement of white men in Illinois. The Sauk and Fox Indians agreed in 1804 to give the United States Government their lands east of the Mississippi River but Black Hawk refused to accept the contract. The Indians were defeated in the Black Hawk War and Black Hawk and his two sons were captured. Death came to him October 31, 1838.

This colossal statue was executed by John Prashun, a sculptor and experienced engineer. He began building a square steel-reinforced tower in 1910. Wire mesh was stretched over it and many layers of plaster of Paris and burlap applied to the form. Ten tons of plaster were reported to have been used for the body. Four



Leo Nelson and Hazel Hyde on the occasion of
Leo's 81st birthday, October 20, 1982

hundred barrels of Portland cement were poured into the mold. It was December 30 when the mold was full and Prashun wrote in an article in SCIENTIFIC AMERICAN it was the "first heroic cement statue". The workers left it to cure until spring. The head, cast separately, was hoisted into place. The mold was broken away in the spring. July 1, 1911, the statue was unveiled. Taft spoke briefly. Wallace Heckman compiled a ninety-page book featuring the text of the speeches.

My personal first viewing of the statue was in 1936 when I had newly arrived in Rockford, Illinois. I had few friends that first year but the road winding along Rock River was one place someone wanted me to see. That was the year that Lorado Taft died. The last campers had left Eagle's Nest, we were told. In 1945 a two hundred-acre plot had become Lowden State Park to honor Oregon native, Frank Lowden, a former governor of Illinois. The second of the two Taft cottages at Eagle's Nest, built of locally quarried limestone still stands. This cottage houses offices for the faculty of Northern Illinois University's Lorado Taft Field Campus. Sixty-six acres, including the former camp, now are the property of Northern Illinois University.

(To be concluded in next issue)

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