

Nuggets of History

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ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY CELEBRATES 25TH BIRTHDAY by Hazel M. Hyde and Robert H. Borden

At the annual banquet on Sunday, March 15, 1987, the Rockford Historical Society celebrated its silver anniversary by enjoying slides of Rockford's history, presented by Jon Lundin. Emmanuel Lutheran Church was the scene of the festivities, presided over by the president, William J. Garson.

In December, 1961, three members of the Swedish Historical Society, Blanche Alden, David W. Johnson, and Herman G. Nelson, applied for a corporation charter from Secretary of State Charles F. Carpentier. The purpose of the society, as stated in the charter, is "to serve the city of Rockford in the preservation of items of historical interest; in compilation, publication and distribution of local history; in owning and maintaining property for use as headquarters, to serve as archives, and the preservation and display of historical materials; in creating a membership of persons interested in local history and the culture

From ROCKFORD MORNING STAR, December 5, 1963



Launch Membership Drive . . .

Philip L. Keister, left, Freeport historian and member of the Stephenson County Board of Supervisors, was speaker at the quarterly meeting of the Rockford Historical Society Wednesday night. Jack C. Mundy, center,

membership chairman, and William M. Barrick, president, formally launched a drive for 500 new members. The group met in Memorial Hall. (Morning Star photo)



Historians Meet, Eat, Elect

About 100 persons wait in the food line at the Rockford Historical Society picnic Sunday at Alpine Park. They elected officers for the coming year. Brice Sheets will continue as president. Others selected were, Robert H. Borden, first vice president; Jessie Robin-

son, second vice president; Emma Lundgren, third vice president; Faith Armstrong, secretary, and Arthur Huenkemeier, treasurer. The society is working to amass and preserve a history of Rockford. (Register-Republic staff photo)

of the community."

On Sunday, March 4, 1962, about 40 people gathered in the basement of the Erlander Home Museum, 404 S. Third Street, to officially launch the organization. William H. Barrick, Georgene Wall, Emma C. Lundgren, Barbara Nilsson, and Jack C. Mundy were named to a committee to prepare the constitution and bylaws for the Rockford Historical Society. The three incorporators were in charge of the meeting explaining the purposes of the organization, and Bernard Wax, a field representative of the Illinois State Historical Society, addressed the group. It was decided to meet again three weeks later, on March 25, and at that time the constitution and bylaws were adopted and the first officers were elected. The late Ray P. Lichtenwalner, a Rockford attorney, was elected president.

At a board of directors meeting in the recreation room of William Barrick, the second president, in the fall of 1963, it was decided that we would publish a semi-monthly historical paper. W. Ashton Johnson, a local history columnist in the Loves Park POST, was chosen as the editor. NUGGETS -- OLD AND NEW was the title of the first issue, dated November-December, 1963. For the second issue, Jan-

uary-February 1964, Mr. Johnson had selected the name NUGGETS OF HISTORY, and thus it has remained.

When land along Guilford Road was donated by Carl Severin for a museum, the Rockford, Swedish, and Harlem Historical Societies joined together to sponsor the Rockford Museum Center at 6799 Guilford Road. The Rockford Park Board agreed to be responsible for outside maintenance, and a new organization emerged, known as Rockford Museum Association. The value of this museum and Midway Village has come to be appreciated as a tourist attraction, and a place where important Rockford and Winnebago County artifacts are preserved.

Charter membership in the Rockford Historical Society remained open for at least two years, enabling people who had not heard about the organizational meetings to become charter members. Nevertheless, at the dinner, when a call was made for a show of hands by the charter members present, only three or four responded. Many of the charter members have passed away, including three of our presidents -- Ray Lichtenwalner, Brice Sheets, and Clement Burns, two of the three incorporators -- Herman Nelson and David Johnson, and our first editor, Ashton Johnson. Others just drifted away. But the Rockford Historical Society continues, bolstered by newer members, such as President Garson, Past President Eldora Ozanne, and other faithful officers, directors, and members who continue to renew their memberships and attend our meetings. Usually five meetings are held each year, including our annual dinner, a historical tour later in the spring, a summer potluck picnic, the annual meeting in early fall, and a meeting in the late fall or early winter featuring a speaker or historical program.

FOR TARA BUSSER, LIFE HAS BEEN A HAPPY SERIES OF "IF'S"
by Bill Garson

If Tara Busser hadn't had parents who exposed her to museums of art and natural history; if she hadn't been introduced to such special things as the Mona Lisa and the Hope Diamond; if she hadn't lived her early years within sight of the Washington Monument, she might never have become the Executive Director of Rockford Museum and Midway Village.

This tall, ebullient young woman with the sparkling hazel eyes and brown hair became enamored of museums because her mother took Tara, when she was just a little tyke, on frequent visits to Washington's Smithsonian Institute and National Gallery of Art.

To discover how a happy series of ifs and coincidences have shaped Tara's life, you must return with Tara to her high school days when she was tested for language aptitude and was selected to be one of 20 students enrolled in a



Tara Busser

pilot Spanish language program.

It was an adventure, Tara remembers. "The teacher shocked us all when she told us on the first day: 'This is the first time and last time that you will hear English spoken in this class.' It was sink or swim. The teacher told me I could do it. And I did. If I hadn't, I never would have been able to get my first museum job."

But there had to be more than that one if, but that was a very important one in the series that was to follow.

Tara Busser is a graduate of Ohio University in Athens where she earned her B.A. degree with a Spanish major. During her college days, she worked in a Washington, D.C., bank summers and other school holidays as a translator for the bank's many Spanish-speaking customers to contribute to her educational expenses. During the summer between her sophomore and junior years, she took courses at the University of Vera Cruz in Mexico.

When she left college, there was no wild demand for a Spanish translator in the museum field. But Tara didn't wish to continue as a financial burden to her parents. She wanted, too, to be independent. So she took the bank translator job full time for a year and went on to a better translator position with Picker International, a company manufacturing medical diagnostic equipment.

Meanwhile, Tara still hunted for a job in a museum, any kind of museum, any kind of job with any kind of a museum. "I was ready and willing to take any job," Tara recalls. "Sweeping floors, taking out the waste paper, any thing just to get a chance to work in a museum."

Soon, an opening for a secretary to the Director of Public Relations and Fund Raising at the Cleveland Museum of Natural History appeared. Tara applied for the job, had three interviews with the director but seemed to be getting nowhere. "I was persistent. I wanted that job but he didn't think I had the necessary background for it. I think that the director finally took pity on me, deciding



Tara Busser
and "friend"

my banking experience could qualify me for expertise in the fund-raising area of his department."

If Tara hadn't had that earlier job of translator in a bank, she wouldn't have entered the museum profession.

During her stay in Cleveland, the director expanded her duties, placing her in charge of the public relations and communications sections of his department so that he could devote more time to fund-raising and acquisitions. One of her responsibilities was the supervision of the Museum's Explorer Magazine.

It was during her supervisory work with the magazine some four or five years ago that she first came across the name "Rockford". One of the members of the Explorer Family was the Burpee Museum of Natural History in Rockford.

Tara remained several years at Cleveland until there was a change of staff. With the change, Tara decided that her future there was approaching a dead end, resigned, and went back to Washington to visit her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Conway Carter, and plan for the future.

A recruiter with whom she had placed her name and qualifications earlier, hearing she'd left Cleveland, got in touch with her only a short time after she was home and told her about the opening for a director at Rockford Museum Center and Midway Village.

The rest is history.

Since her arrival in Rockford in March, 1984, Tara Busser has spearheaded successful fund drives for the Rockford Museum Center and Midway Village. She has dramatized the role of the Village in re-enacting and recording the history of Rockford. She was a leader in the city's Sesquicentennial observance that featured the return of descendants of Germanicus Kent, one of Rockford's founders.

She is a member of the American Association of Museums, the Midwest Museums Conference, the National Society of Fund-Raising Executives and the Northern Illinois Tour-

ism Council.

Tara's hobbies go right along with her profession. She is an avid collector of antiques, from postcards to furniture. She loves vintage clothes from the early 1900's, the 1920's and the 1940's.

An unusual interest is hair funerary art items, such as wall-hangings, watch fobs, wreaths and other objects. This was an art form that thrived during the 1860's and the Civil War years before dying out.

Pride of her collections of 1860's memorabilia is the whole series of letters that a Civil War soldier, one of her family ancestors, wrote to his wife during the war, including letters he wrote from the Confederacy's Libby prison, where he was held as a prisoner of war.

So, after all the ifs and coincidences, the little girl who grew up within sight of the Washington monument and once viewed the Mona Lisa and the Hope Diamond, finally became a museum's executive director.

Meet once again Tara Busser, Executive Director of Rockford Museum Center and Midway Village, an outstanding leader and Woman of Achievement and no ifs about that!

GIRL SCOUTS CELEBRATE SEVENTY-FIFTH BIRTHDAY

by Hazel M. Hyde
(Continued from Winter issue)

It was at a National Convention in Long Beach, California, in 1946 that the Girl Scouts of United States voted to accept the association plan of organization described as "Under the Green Umbrella" that covered the concept of area scouting. In a conversation at a book group in early January, May Lynn said, "Those years were the fun years, full of activity and usefulness". Clear in mind, the wonderful lady gives a book review without reading it from notes.

What effect would scouting years have? Isabel Seal (Mrs. Finch) has a wild flower garden where friends may see Dutchman's breeches, Virginia bluebells, buttercups, and other wild flowers each spring. This interest may have been nourished by scouting experiences. Her eight decades of life reflect many of the virtues found in the Girl Scout Promise and the Girl Scout Law. She was a council president 1949-51, and she remembered her years of working with Girl Scouts of this area as filled with happy and worthwhile activities. She said troupes walked or rode bicycles to parks and forest preserves. Enjoyment as well as service was important. Handicraft was only one area of activity. Girls learned to work together as a group.

Recalling the days when her daughter was a Girl Scout, Beverley Whitehead (Mrs. John) remembered that her husband, John, would go out to the camp and gather a group to gaze at the midnight sky. He would point out the constellations and tell the stories from mythology



RUTH HANNA McCORMICK SIMMS.

that had given them their names. The troop members felt they had been given a fine experience. Leaders of the present time would mention a much up-dated type of adventures and learning experiences, for the program continues to expand. Beverley gave permission to quote from the book *FOUNDED ON THE ROCK*, saying it had been compiled from scrapbooks, reports, snapshots and other collected memorabilia and that it had been many years since she had actively worked with scouts. I had a distinct impression that she felt the council should build on their impressive past but be looking toward the future.

In a visit together after Rockford Woman's Club program, I asked Myrtle Mitchell, who had spent many hours researching the history of girl scouting in this area, what she thought of presenting the story in vignettes about the adventures and memories of a number of people. She considered for a moment and said one problem now solved was the search for a permanent home, or headquarters, a meeting place with adequate room. Then she listed most of the places that had been used: Troops met in Second Congregational Church and in the garden house, a studio.



COLLECTING THE GREASE TO "SMEAR AXIS".



TROOPHOUSE.

located behind the present Burpee Funeral Home, which was behind the home of Mrs. Darwin Keith at 420 North Main Street. Office space was located under the stairs of Second Congregational Church and was much appreciated. The Keith building was two stories, with the top being used by the girls and the lower part for the Executive Director. This building had formerly held the Copper Cup Antique Shop. There were about ten registered troops by that time. In 1930 the Council rented a suite of rooms on the third floor of the Rockford Light, Gas and Coke Company on the northwest corner of Wyman and Mulberry Streets for the sum of \$25. a month, plus the cost of heat and light. That building has been torn down. They started a fund for the "Little House" but had pressing obligations and were forced to use the money. From 1932 to 1966 the quarters were in Rockford News Tower Building. In 1966 a relocation committee was formed with Elizanne Lewis (Mrs. H. Walter) as chairman and a Men's Advisory Council. They handled the details



THE MACY KITCHEN.



Vivian Carter Johnson, 1986. First executive director of Rock River Valley Council of Girl Scouts of America.

that secured the former Church of the Christian Union Unitarian building on Auburn Street as a home and head quarters for \$80,000. In the capital fund drive the largest individual gift was \$10,000 from Mrs. Albert Johnson. Some people believe this was the greatest change affecting the Council. Probably the securing of the Medill McCormick Camp and land along Rock River was even more exciting.

Mrs. Fred J. Kampmeier (Grace), a Girl Scout Volunteer for 50 years, and President of the Council 1944-46 sent the following memories in response to my request for information:

The Rockford Council of Girl Scouts--later to become the Rock River Council of Girl Scouts through the cooperation of Rockford Industries, Service Clubs and dedicated volunteers have had the pleasure of watching the growth of its membership and service from a single



May Lynn (Mrs. Frank), age 94, was present at the Dedication in 1940 of Camp Medill McCormick. Chairman of the building committee at that time, Mrs. Lynn remembers her years with Girl Scouts as a time of usefulness and of joy.

troop in 1926 to Sea Scouts, Daisy Scouts, Brownies, Juniors, Cadettes, Seniors, active Adults and Alumnae Club, as the newest service, each having their part in Girl Scout Growth.

The Troop House was the first building at Camp Medill McCormick, which Mrs. Simms gave the Girl Scouts in 1938. Jesse Barloga was the architect. The logs, poles were purchased for one dollar from the Electric Company. The huge fire place of native stone was the gift of the Moose Club. The wagon wheels, chandeliers, were given by the farmers to hang the lanterns on for lights.

At the dedication of the Troop House in 1943 the Bronze Plaque carried this poem by Theresa Hanitz:

"This house is built--
with rafters strong as the bonds of long friendship,
with walls that are warm as a mother bird's wings,
with windows that lure the sunbeams to dancing,
with hearthstone inviting young voices to sing,

This house is built--
for girls questing knowledge from hillsides and valleys
whose hands reach out to the girls of all nations,
Let no girl be stranger who enters here."

In 1966 the Girl Scouts were asked to vacate the News Tower Site. A Men's Advisory Committee was secured to help find a new place. James Shepherd and Stan Smith were the committee. The Girl Scouts learned the Church of the Christian Union was for sale. Stan Smith had been on the

Building Committee when it was built. Talking with Mr. Hubbard, the architect, he told us of the builder's name and gave us his address in Florida. A money raising campaign was headed by Morris Davis and Paul Lindstead for the Rockford Area. Ruby Engstrom and Grace Kampmeier headed the Girl Scout Family part of the drive. All went well and five years later, in 1971, Cindy Patterson, Council President, Mrs. Albert Johnson and Grace Kampmeier burned the mortgage at the annual Girl Scout meeting.

Each person with whom I talked informally stressed the point that what had happened in the past was good but that this is a forward looking organization. Turning to a blue backed book 75 YEARS OF GIRL SCOUTING, a person may read about career exploration to provide youth with tools for securing employment; the outreach to the minorities, collaboration with scores of organizations and government agencies and voluntary sectors involving youth employment, health, crime prevention, juvenile justice, troubled families, youth with disabilities, energy conservation, environmental concerns and further commitment to community service. We see that the Girl Scouts have not lost traditional values but that they are involving themselves in modern problems. At the time of the 70th anniversary the girls undertook Global Understanding projects. Selecting one of five topics-- health care, hunger, literacy, natural resources, or cultural heritage, the girls increased their knowledge of the Girl Scout movement and some major issues affecting girls around the world.

Medill McCormick, grandson of Joseph Medill, who founded the CHICAGO TRIBUNE and son of the diplomat Robert S., and his wife Ruth, daughter of Alonzo Hanna, national chairman of the Republic Party in the 1890's, delighted in the sweeping view from the Byron bluffs. In 1916 they bought 2,400 acres on South Main Road near Byron known as the Rock River Farms. To protect their view they purchased 285 acres across Rock River on the Stillman Valley side. It is the woodlands across the river that later became the Girl Scout Camp. It was unspoiled with natural growth trees and every species of wildflowers known to Northern Illinois. It was deeded to the Girl Scout Council as a gift in 1939.

The Medill McCormick Girl Scout Camp came to be known as a double conservation area--being designated a State Of Illinois game preserve and by the National Girl Scout Council and recognized by the National Government known as Lou Henry Hoover Memorial Forest.

Vivian Carter Johnson (Mrs. Elmer W.) met with James Rogers, Mrs. Simms' business manager, and worked out a ten-year plan for developing the camp with stipulations that it should not be sold in the lifetime of a living descendant or within thirty years; that it have an appropriate identification, and it was to be kept as a wildlife sanctuary.

When Grace Kampmeier (Mrs. Fred), chairman of the council's camp committee accompanied Vivian Johnson to see the land, a sight met their eyes vividly described by Vivian. It was the time of seven-year locusts and hundreds, perhaps thousands, of discarded chrysalises

shone like crystals in the light, a fairy-like view. Heavily timbered, it supported a herd of approximately 150 deer, many red fox, raccoons, and gray squirrels.

The gateway is of natural stone and this beautiful entryway was a gift of Ruth Hanna McCormick Simms. An easement donated by Mrs. Augusta Peterson made possible access by automobile to the camp.

A favorite story is that during the war years there was a request that waste fats be saved and sold back to the government for bomb bands or airwing de-icers. The Girl Scout Leaders' Association agreed to take on the grease salvage drive as a project in 1942. Money was shared between the troops and the fund for the Troop-House at camp. It is called "The House that Grease Built". Jesse Barloga, a Rockford architect, donated drawings for the camp troophouse as a gift to the Girl Scouts.

Vivian Johnson was most gracious and jotted down several recollections as she sat at her desk waiting for someone with whom she had an appointment. She stated: Memory brings to mind that when Camp Medill McCormick opened all meals were prepared in the open kitchen units. Central staff meals were eaten in units except breakfast which was prepared in my tent on a kerosene stove. Girls were housed in screened, floored tents, four to a tent. They had comfortable housing, but otherwise, it was primitive camping, and they had a wonderful experience, and enjoyed it.

There was not water that first year and there was a full enrollment in the camp! Spence Merz, Superintendent of the Rockford Water Department, and a member of the Men's Advisory Committee to the Girl Scout Council solved the problem. Great tanks of water were brought to camp. Sterile barrels were provided and the camp was taught how to keep them sterile. Each unit had its own barrels which were brought to the parking lot where the big tanks were stationed.

The first cookie sale was a landmark too. All the cookies were baked by the Federal Bakery located on West State Street, the second door, next to what was then Pitney's Grocery, and is now a drug store. Hundreds of dozens of hand stamped cookies. The baker, Walter Bartlett, now deceased, fulfilled the order, but had a hand and arm, swollen like a club as a result. Milk came in bottles in those days and every circular seal on every bottle advertised the Girl Scout Cookie Sale.

(continued in next issue)

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