

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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COUNTY AND PROBATE JUDGES OF WINNEBAGO COUNTY 1850-1964

by Robert J. Lindvall

Winnebago County Law Librarian

The Illinois Constitution of 1848 established a county court system for the 102 counties of the state. This system was one of several court systems in the state until 1964 when Illinois established a unified court system. During the 116 years of the county system, twelve individuals served as jurists for the County of Winnebago. This article will review the lives of these jurists.

The type of matters heard by this court was established in section 18 of the 1848 constitution: all probate matters, criminal cases with a fine of less than \$100, and divorce proceedings. Later the juvenile court became part of the county court system when the Juvenile Court Act was passed in 1899. The criminal jurisdiction was later expanded to all misdemeanors.

Sheldon M. Church was the first Winnebago County Judge to be elected under the 1848 constitution. Church was born March 4, 1804, in East Haddam, Connecticut, but moved the same year with his parents to Monroe County, New York. After farming for a few years, Church became a school teacher in Cincinnati, Ohio, being one of its first teachers in the new public school system. Later he moved back to New York to be a mercantile businessman in Rochester, New York, until 1835 when he moved to Geneva, Illinois.

In the fall of 1836 Church moved to Rockford. Here he found work as a logger at a mill and for three years as a clerk for Germanicus Kent until he was appointed County Clerk in 1839. While serving as County Clerk until 1847, Church was also postmaster from 1843 to 1847. He served as a delegate to the Constitutional Convention of 1847 from which the Constitution of 1848 developed.

Seldon Church was elected County Judge in 1849 and served two four-year terms. Further political posts for Church were two years in the General Assembly (1861-1862) and ten years as Supervisor of Rockford Township. He held the distinction of being the only county judge for Winnebago who was not a lawyer. Kett, in his 1877 history, listed Church as a capitalist living at the corner of South Avon and Cedar.

Judge Church's successor on the county bench was Anson S. Miller, a prominent lawyer and politician. Prior to his eight years on the bench (1857-1865), Miller served as state senator, to which he was elected in 1846, and as postmaster of Rockford appointed by President Lincoln, for whom he voted as an elector in the 1864 electoral college. Judge Miller died at age 82 on January 7, 1891, in Santa Cruz, California, where he had resided for twenty years.

Abram S. Van Dyke, a Pecatonica lawyer, succeeded Judge Miller. Van Dyke, born in 1810 in New York, came to Illinois in 1854. Besides his two terms as County Judge (1865-1873), Van Dyke at various times was town clerk, school director, supervisor, and Justice of the Peace.

Following Judge Van Dyke as county judge was Rufus C. Bailey, who held the position for over thirty-two years (1873-1906). Judge



JUDGE RUFUS C. BAILEY.



F. E. CARPENTER.

Bailey was born July 28, 1823, in Auburn, Maine, to Moses and Anne (Chandler) Bailey. Young Rufus attended school in his native state of Maine and then went to Amherst College, where he completed his studies in 1855.

After Amherst, Bailey headed west to secure employment. He secured a job as railroad engineer for the newly-formed Kenosha and Rockford Railroad. This employment ended in 1857 when he began his study of the law as a clerk for the firm of Lathrop and Brown. Passing the bar in 1860, Bailey joined the Lathrop-Brown firm. For the next twelve years, in addition to his law practice he was busy serving as City Attorney (1863) and the Republican Party, which nominated him for the County Judgeship in 1873.

Masonry and Elks were Judge Bailey's fraternal interests, while the Church of the Christian Union was his religious affiliation. October 29, 1910, was the date of his death some four years after his retirement from the bench.

Lewis M. Reckhow was elected in 1906 to succeed Judge Bailey. Reckhow was born February 22, 1868, in Shirland Township. After graduating in 1891 from Beloit College, he moved to Rockford to practice law. During his law practice he also served as city attorney (1903-1906). After leaving the judgeship in 1918, Judge Reckhow practiced law with Earl Reynolds, who would later become a circuit judge.

Besides being active in many bar associations, Judge Reckhow was active in the Centennial M. E. Church, Elks, Kiwanis, Sinnissippi-Ingersoll Golf Club, and the University Club. Judge Reckhow died in 1924 at the age of 56.

Fred E. Carpenter, the next county judge, came from an early Winnebago County family. His mother's ancestors were 1835 settlers of Guilford Township where Fred was born December 5, 1869. After graduating from Rockford High School in 1886, Carpenter farmed with his father and taught school before enrolling at the University of



L. M. RECKHOW.

Illinois.

In 1896 Carpenter began working with his uncle, Charles A. Works, in the law firm of Works and Hyer. Three years later he passed the bar and started to practice law on his own. For the first four years of his judgeship, which began in 1918, Judge Carpenter handled probate matters, but in 1922 the separate probate court was established because Winnebago County was one of the large counties allowed to have a probate court apart from the county court. Failing to receive the Republican nomination in 1930, Judge Carpenter left the bench, but returned in 1934 to serve four years as probate judge.

Besides his legal career, Judge Carpenter served as the first president of the Rockford Park District, Mayor Bennett's president of the Fire and Police Board, and during World War I on the Fourth District Appeal Board.

The next person to hold the County Judge post was George Liddell, who had been chosen over Carpenter in the Republican primary of 1930. Prior to being a lawyer in Rockford, Judge Liddell was a sportswriter in Iowa, a teacher at Rockford High School, minister of Westminster Presbyterian Church from 1918 to 1923, a mayoral candidate in 1923, and for a short time a prosecuting attorney in Oklahoma.

After losing the mayoral election in 1923 to Herman Hallstrom, Judge Liddell was selected to be city attorney. During this time, he handled the litigation over the Jefferson Street Bridge assessment of cost case before the Illinois Commerce Commission. For the three years before his judgeship, Liddell was a partner with Carl Solomonson in the practice of law, with offices in the Manufacturers National Bank Building.

During World War II Judge Liddell moved to Washington, D. C., to be a trial examiner for the Federal Power Commission. This is where he ended his legal career.

The 1934 Democratic election sweep brought Oren M. Williams to the county bench for a four-year term, after having defeated Judge Liddell. Judge Williams, a direct descendent of Roger Williams, founder of Rhode Island, was born February 26, 1858, at Harrison, Illinois, where his father (James) in 1843 began operating a saw mill.

Judge Williams attended Durand High School, Becker's Business College, and Chicago Union College of Law. In law school he was a classmate of William Jennings Bryan, the "Great Commoner". They were

L. C. (Dick) Miller



close life long friends, both going west to start the practice of law. Williams chose South Dakota in which to practice, but remained only a few years, returning to Rockford in 1890.

Prior to his judgeship, Oren Williams was a justice of the peace for nineteen years. After being defeated for re-election to the county bench in 1938, Williams joined B.J. Knight in the law practice. Civic and fraternal associations of Judge Williams included Odd Fellows, Woodmen of the World, Elk, and Big Brothers.

The final County Judge for Winnebago County was Rockford native Fred J. Kullberg, who was born in 1905. His father, John, was a partner in Kullberg and Faulkner Shoe Store on East State Street and later a clothier on Seventh Street. After graduating from Rockford High School, where he was center on the 1922-23 championship basketball team, Kullberg attended Augustana College and captained the basketball team there.

Upon completion of his law studies at Northwestern University, Fred Kullberg returned to Rockford where in 1932 he became an assistant state's attorney for Robert Nash and active in the Republican Party and the John Ericsson Club. When the Republican Party in 1938 was concerned about returning the county judgeship to the party fold, Judge Kullberg was nominated for the position. He won the election over Judge Williams and began a 34-year judicial career.

This career had several highlights: a successful election for Loves Park to become a city, the building of the Juvenile Welfare Building on Elm Street, a 1965 award by the Illinois Probation and Parole Association for his juvenile court work, and the successful establishment of Rock Valley College. All of Judge Kullberg's career on the bench (even the time he was a circuit judge) was in the 1916 annex to the courthouse. Judge Kullberg was scheduled to move to the new courthouse in the 1970s, but balked at the move. He referred to the new building as a "mausoleum with small windows". Now in his 80s Judge Kullberg resides on Chicago Avenue.

As previously mentioned, in 1922 a Probate Court and judgeship was established for Winnebago County. First to hold the position was Walker F. Hull. Judge Hull held the post until 1934 when he ran for County Judge and was defeated by Judge Williams. Hull was born in 1888 and practiced law in Rockford prior to his selection as Probate Judge. After leaving the bench Judge Hull practiced law in the Rockford Trust Building until 1942.

During World War II Judge Hull was in the Judge Advocate's Office, rising to the rank of colonel. He saw duty in the Far East and returned to Korea also. After his time in the service he returned to Rockford to retire in 1949 and resided on Simpson Road. Judge Hull died January 14, 1976, at Fort Myers, Florida, where he had moved in 1971.

Following former County Judge Fred Carpenter's four years (1934-38) as Probate Judge was Morris J. Hinchcliff, a Clinton, Illinois, native born August 12, 1877. Hinchcliff moved to Rockford in 1921 to practice law after a twenty year legal practice in Clinton. This Illinois Wesleyan graduate was active in the Masons, Elk, Rotary and Mid-Day Club. An avid sportsman, Judge Hinchcliff maintained five wooded acres on Lyford Road where he was able to enjoy the outdoors. In 1946 at the age of 68 Judge Hinchcliff died while still Probate Judge.

Newspaperman and attorney LaVerne Clarence "Dick" Miller was appointed by Governor Dwight H. Green to be the Probate Judge upon Judge Hinchcliff's death. Judge Miller held the post only until the 1946

election a few months after his appointment. Born January 5, 1885, in Chana, Illinois, Judge Miller first was a journalist with the ROCKFORD REPUBLIC. While a courthouse reporter in Rockford, Miller became interested in the law and changed careers. Later in life he returned to the fourth estate and served as vice president and part owner of the Rockford Newspapers, from which he retired in 1975. Six years later on September 8, 1981, Judge Miller passed away.

The final Probate Judge was Seely P. Forbes. Elected in 1946, Judge Forbes held the probate position until it was abolished in 1964. A member of a pioneer Rockford family, Judge Forbes was the son of Mr. and Mrs. Walter A. Forbes. He was a graduate of Yale College and Yale Law School (1932), and was admitted to the Illinois bar in 1933. After working two years in Chicago, Forbes did graduate work at the University of Wisconsin, then practiced law from a Talcott Building office. His career was interrupted by Army service from 1942 to 1946 in the India-China area.

One may think that probate work is very dry, but Judge Forbes in a 1970s Rockford newspaper article recalled the following two humorous experiences in probate court:

"In one probate case, there was a woman who had been in an institution and I had appointed a conservator for her. One day she appeared in my chambers with her hands in a large muff. She announced she had a gun. I leaped out of my chair..."

The judge jumps from behind his desk, an expression of alarm on his face. He smiles. "Then she pulled her two empty hands out of the muff and said, 'Ha! Ha!'"

"Another time I was hearing a petition for appointment of a conservator for an alleged incompetent. The lawyer arguing the case stepped from his chair for a minute and the alleged incompetent quietly pulled the chair back." Judge Forbes moves to two chairs at an adjacent table to illustrate the story. "When the lawyer went to sit down, he went—plop! Right on the floor...!" The judge chuckles as he recalls that hearing. "The man was ruled incompetent."

Besides handling probate matters, Judge Forbes helped Judge Kullberg with the juvenile cases. This area Judge Forbes recalled could be very rewarding, as was the probate area. He enjoyed seeing matters resolved in a proper way in both areas of the law. Judge Forbes retired in 1976 with the last twelve years on the bench in the circuit court system. He now lives in retirement in his National Avenue home.

When the county and probate courts were abolished in 1964, the matters heard in these courts were heard by the associate judges as they are today. This part of the circuit court still has some of the old system because it is referred to as the county division.

ST. ANTHONY PARISH, ROCKFORD DEANERY by Hazel M. Hyde (Continued from last issue)

The first meeting of the newly-formed Italian congregation met in St. James Pro-Cathedral on Palm Sunday, April 12, 1909. (See: Vol. 9 No. 4 p. 1 July-August 1972. Burns, Clem V.: "The Saint James Story".) Bishop Muldoon addressed the gathering, and Father Marchesano explained to 250 Italian families assembled the reasons for establishing the Italian parish. By 1976 there were more than a thousand Italian

families listed in St. Anthony's membership.

Peter James Muldoon, the first bishop of Rockford, was born in the mining community of Columbia, Tuolumma County, California, on October 10, 1862. (Some newspaper accounts give the year as 1863.) His parents were John and Catherine Coughlin Muldoon, both born in Ireland, immigrating to the United States while in their teens. A short time after Peter's birth, the family moved to Stockton, where the father became a prosperous building contractor. Young Peter received his early education in Stockton and his college studies at St. Mary's College near Lebanon, Kentucky, where his uncle, the Reverend John A. Coughlin, was a member of the faculty.

Next, the man who was to become a bishop studied at St. Mary's Seminary in Boston, where he enrolled in philosophical and theological training under the Sulpician Fathers. He was ordained to priesthood in 1886, and his first assignment was as an assistant at St. Pius Church in Chicago. By 1901 Father Muldoon was appointed Auxiliary Bishop of Chicago. In Chicago he was pastor of St. Charles Borromeo Church. It was September 28, 1908, when he was appointed as the first Bishop of Rockford.

The Reverend Father Anthony Marchesano began his ministry in Rockford holding masses in the basement of St. Mary's Catholic Church, which had been formed in 1885. St. Mary's Church on Winnebago Street had served the west side of Rock River until this time. The area known as South Rockford had taken on a feeling of unity as a community desiring its own churches and schools.

St. Anthony Church and rectory were completed in 1910, to the joy of its communicants. It was a one story building on Ferguson Street. The dedication ceremony, presided over by Bishop Muldoon on January 23, 1910, was colorful and well-attended. Italian dignitaries from all parts of the United States came to Rockford to participate or to observe the joyful celebration.

The second story of the church began in 1915 and was used as a school. The missionary Franciscan sisters of the Immaculate Conception from Boston came as staff. On September 7 there were two-hundred fifty children registered. Montague School (built in 1883), Barbour and Kent Schools were the public schools of the area. But many Italian parents felt a parochial school offering religious training was better for their children.

A need for a separate building led in 1919 to the erection of a hall next to the church, sponsored by the National Catholic War Council. The cost of \$13,000 was considered well spent as the hall was to be used for an Americanization school. The Italian people of Rockford sought to learn the English language as quickly as they could. They retained some of their customs such as the St. Joseph's altars held after a special favor or the healing from an illness or injury.

The dream of Father Marchesano for a whole new parish plant began to take shape in 1929. A gymnasium was completed and much work on the church had been accomplished. Father Marchesano's health began to fail and he left Rockford for Rochester, Minnesota, where he died, August 26, 1929, without seeing the reality he had envisioned for Rockford. Marchesano Drive, named in his honor, helps to keep alive the memory of his work.

A long-time friend of the deceased priest was Father John Flanagan, who volunteered to carry out the planned work. He was fluent in the Italian language and served the community well during his short



tenure. On August 18, 1930, Bishop Hoban dedicated the new church. Father Flanagan died in Amarillo, Texas, en route to California, March 11, 1931.

Another short term pastorate was held by Father Russell Guccione, who had been Father Flanagan's assistant. He was appointed administrator and later pastor, but only remained until December 31, 1932.

Bishop Hoban requested the Franciscan Order of Minor Conventuals to take over the care of St. Anthony parish. Father Dominic Szymanski, O.F.M. Conv., was appointed pastor, January 1, 1933, and was to remain for twelve years. While he served, property was bought on Kent and Corbin Streets and converted to a garden with a shrine of the Blessed Mother and St. Anthony. The old convent was sold and a larger home secured for the sisters in 1942. The children who attended Washington Junior High School spoke of Father Dominic often, and he was apparently well-liked in the community. The parish debt was reduced more than one-third. On August 29, 1945, he was transferred to another parish.

During the tenure of Father Maurice Bora, the church was redecorated in 1953; chimes replaced the tower bell; and the debt was reduced by \$150,000. Father Maurice was transferred August 16, 1957. By

St. Anthony School (R) and Gym (L)
St. Francis Consolidated School, K-Grade 4



this time there were a number of stores owned by American citizens of Italian descent. Also many other nationalities were represented in the neighborhood: Polish, Lithuanians, Jewish, and Latinos. There had been Black families for some time but more Black children were found in public schools. Some Italian families had begun to move out of South Rockford. The pattern was: early settlers mostly from New England and of English descent; the Irish; many Italians; other nationalities; and the Blacks. Each new wave of peoples seemed characterized by the immediate purchase of homes in the area. St. Elizabeth's Social Center, Montague House, and Booker T. Washington Center offered social opportunities and recreation.

Father Anastasius Kuzdrzol, O.F.M. Conv., who served as an assistant to Father Maurice, succeeded him as pastor. On February 13, 1958, the homes at 1821 and 1825 Morgan Street were sold and in July they were removed to form a parking lot. On June 1, 1948, work was started on four modern classrooms. The new school addition was blessed and dedicated to the memory of Father Marchesano, and the annex bore his name. Father Anastasius served until 1963. He was succeeded by Father Edwin Banach who served until 1969. The children of Washington Junior High School continued to write in my classes about the historic spots in the area. A unit of Black History was taught in social studies. Children told the history of their own homes and plagued their parents to see the abstract so they could learn who were the first owners. One of the great surprises was to learn that an Indian had formerly owned the land where a home stood.

In 1969 the new sisters' convent was completed, and it was dedicated in 1971. The Missionary Franciscan Sisters of the Immaculate Conception took up residence in the convent. The St. Francis Consolidated School combined three parish schools: St. Peter and Paul, St. Anthony, and St. Stanislaus. The grades were divided so that kindergarten through grade four students were assigned to St. Anthony; grades five through six were to attend St. Peter and Paul, and grades seven and eight were to attend St. Stanislaus.

Priests at St. Anthony through 1975 were: Father Samuel Bonikowski, O.F.M. Conv., coming in 1972; Father Thomas Zagorski, O.F.M., Conv., also in 1972, serving until 1975 when Father Leo Dombrowski, O.F.M. Conv., was appointed September 10.

The former coach and instructor, Leo Campisi, who taught at Montague School on Court and Montague Streets, had a brother who made a study of the Italian population of Rockford in the 1930s. There were some interesting statistics. Also, the July 1987 issue of ROCKFORD magazine has an article speaking of recent changes. All the articles show the way in which the church is truly central to Italian culture and daily life.

It was my privilege to be invited into a number of Italian homes from 1936 through 1968. I found the Italian people friendly and outgoing. They are very polite and hospitable. When I was married in 1964, an Italian friend supplied the recipe for meat sauce and the way to cook spaghetti. A teacher of Italian-American descent taught me how to make noodles on a noodle-making machine. I never shall forget the first glass of home-brewed Italian wine I drank. In 1965 I made my first visit to Italy and they were happy that I could see what a beautiful country it is. Those who came from Sicily were sorry I didn't visit that part of Italy, stopping short at Naples, Amalfi Drive, and Isle of Capri. The Italians excel in food-related shops: restaurants, fruit and vegetable markets, and bakery. Many brought with them a love of opera, fine glass, and a sense of style. From the nuns of St. Elizabeth I learned a secret: how to quiet a happy, noisy, chattering group of children.

Article which appeared in the October 5, 1914, issue of THE ROCKFORD REGISTER-GAZETTE. Donated by Mrs. Howard Monk.

Converting Bottomless Kishwaukee Road Into Trade And Pleasure Avenue Leading Into The City of Rockford

The proposal of the late Ralph Emerson for the improvement of the Kishwaukee road by means of volunteer subscriptions, in which he had become interested through choosing a location on the Kishwaukee for a summer home, took practical form through the personal efforts of the New Milford commissioner of highways, Oscar Carlson. Mr. Carlson made it his business to secure subscriptions from the farmers and automobile owners in the neighborhoods which have use for that road, and has raised \$1,100 for this object, contributed by people as far away as Stillman Valley. It required a great deal of canvassing and met with rebuff in a few places where they ought to have been most interested, but Mr. Carlson won. Before his death Mr. Emerson had done \$200 worth of work on the road and contributed \$50 more to the general fund at the disposal of the commissioner. The expenditure of this means is now in progress. A tractor and grader are at work bringing the road up to the grade established by the county highway engineer, A. R. Carter. The road is graded full width and is given a stone center with rock contributed by Herbert Lewis from his quarry. The present fund will give a stone road a mile and a quarter long, over the worst part of the long stretch.

When Mr. Carlson first set out on this improvement he brought the enterprise before the Rockford Chamber of Commerce to see what Rockford would do for establishing a permanent highway across the New Milford sag. It was suggested to him that he first see how much inter-

est the farmers immediately benefited would take in the improvement. The farmers have made good. Now it is up to the business interests and the automobile owners of Rockford to do their part. A fund of \$2,000 or \$3,000 additional to what has been done would go a long ways towards bringing this new stone road to the city limits here. The bad stretch to be crossed is one of several miles, the worst of which is covered by the section now being put it. It opens up to Rockford trade a large region, both in this and Ogle and Dekalb counties. In bad weather the roads are impassable for practically all travel; a four-horse team being unequal to more than the haul of part of a load, while the automobile is out of the question. When the going is difficult that country has to go elsewhere to trade. Now is the time for Rockford to act.

The township of New Milford is provided with road materials in the distribution of rock quarries and gravel beds to a degree almost without parallel in the state of Illinois. It has the drawback, however, of having to carry the wear of 19 miles of trunk line roads with hard travel from territory outside; 19 miles that properly belong to state and county care. Its natural surface and soil beset road making with more than the usual difficulties, in material and topographical conditions. With the severe additional wear of the automobile tires the funds of the township are not adequate to keeping up with the demands; the work deteriorating faster than it can be put in. Some of the roads pass through the bottom of a basin, a natural sink, with bad soil to contend with. Others are through sand. There are also a great many bridges and culverts, for the Kishwaukee and Killbuck and smaller streams and the necessary provision for carrying off the storm waters. Hence the need of outside co-operation to overcome pressing difficulties.

With the severe drawbacks encountered by reason of the hills and valleys, the sand and soft soils of New Milford, no permanent headway can be made till the drainage of the roads is provided for. In many places, for lack of adequate drainage, the wear has destroyed the work of earlier years as fast as it was attempted. Mr. Carlson has therefore set himself to the task of equipping the roads with concrete bridges and culverts of sufficient capacity for the maximum needs. Out of the limited funds at his disposal last year he built two town bridges, that is, bridges not large enough to admit of county appropriation, at an expense of \$800 for the two. This year he has put in a number of important culverts. One of them is at the junction of the road descending the north side of the big hill just north of the village with the side road from the east. Here the storm waters from two directions had overborne every effort to provide for them and made a channel for themselves down the middle of the road; destructive of any attempts toward betterment. This concrete construction was done by his own hard work, without going through the hands of contractors, at a cost of only \$135. No other like work has been accomplished in this county this year under a cost of \$225, according to Superintendent Carter. The road has been graded up and the waters provided for by adequate side ditches. It is a long grade, on one of the main thoroughfares. The work will not have to be done over again although the road bed will have to be protected against future wear. The town gets a good deal for its money.

Mr. Carlson owes his first inspiration to better roads for New Milford to an incident of 32 years ago. He is in his second year as highway commissioner. When a lad it fell to his duty and that of his brother to drive some stock from their previous place near Rockford

across New Milford to Ogle county. In crossing the permanent mud-hole in the road in the piece of woods south of the village he became mired and lost both of his copper toed boots in the mud. He declared to his brother at the time that he hoped to live to have charge of the roads there and fix up that bad place. It was 31 years before the chance came, but the opportunity had kept. Now people who are wont to pass that way are grateful for the relief and express their appreciation, even though they do not know to whom they owe the improvement. The road through the woods has been widened and filled. The mud-hole is gone.

Although the bridge and culvert work has demanded a large part of the funds it is work that will never have to be done again; concrete construction, on adequate plans, leaving that part of the undertaking completed. In addition considerable work has been done, so far as the means permitted, in grading permanent roads with stone or gravel centers; while the roads already improved are kept up in condition by shearing their shoulders and bringing the materials into better surface to shed the water and hold their place in the track. Mr. Carlson is of the conviction that if the people of the township would open their hearts to voting a road tax of \$1 a year instead of 61 cents for five years till the culvert work was completed in enduring shape the town would then be able to give the entire proceeds of the highway fund to placing the lesser roads in fine order, and all would be well served. For one thing Mr. Carlson has the admiration of the county engineer's office in that the road work has not been extended in any spirit of favoritism to Mr. Carlson's own neighborhood. The whole town is benefited by the work done; not individual neighbors alone. That spirit is worthy of faithful public support.

The question now remains, What will Rockford do about it? It is the best opportunity yet presented to reach a large result by united effort for a permanent highway to a big country that seeks Rockford but is shut out much of the year. The trade is dollars and cents to the business street here. Are we big enough to see it and act?

THE MEXICANS AMONG US

by Hazel M. Hyde

(From a talk given for American Heritage
Group of Rockford Chapter NSDAR)

Since Rockford has a fairly large group of Mexican-Americans, the article "The Mexicans Among Us" by Richard Rodriguez in March 1986 issue of READERS DIGEST is of more than passing interest. The sub-headline is a quotable truth: "Much of the United States was once Mexico, and the mark of its culture and people upon us is indelible." The man who discussed the subject in print is a writer and lecturer who lives in California. His book HUNGER OF MEMORY chronicles his upbringing as a Mexican-American in Sacramento. His parents had arrived from Mexico in the 1940s but the story he tells is typical of people living in the West and Southwest parts of Rockford. One point he makes is that we are accustomed to reading American history from east to west. There is a development in our history from south to north with very early happenings. History books name 16th century conquistadores and Span-

ish explorers of the Southwest. But alongside these were the mestizos, persons of mixed blood, part Indian and part Spanish. Most who came from Mexico were of mixed blood. These were the people who did the digging, the planting, the irrigating in the Southwest. For three centuries it remained Spanish, then became Mexican in 1821. Even non-Hispanics who drifted into that territory adopted Hispanic ways. In 1848 the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo gave to United States nearly one-half of Mexican land. Texas, New Mexico, Arizona, California, Nevada, and Utah, as well as parts of Colorado, Kansas, Oklahoma, and Wyoming became a part of United States territory.

According to Franklin E. Graham and Carol Mathers, in WE THE PEOPLE, edited by Hal and Isy Nelson in 1975, the first Latin immigrant came in 1907 to Winnebago County. They tell the story of Juan Cervantes who came from Mexico, who was from the best educated class and had been forced to flee during the Revolution. This set such people apart from later groups, many of whom had little education.

It was a picture of Theoplelo "Tuffy" Quinonez that steered my research to this book. As head of the social studies department at Washington Junior High School, I visited the classes of teachers in the department. I had been briefed by Mrs. Ivar Dahlgren to observe Tuffy Quinonez, who had some promising personality traits and a great interest in learning. As I recall this was a seventh grade geography class. Margaret Dahlgren had completed her practice teaching in my classes, coming later to teach in the department. She had acquired habits of teaching, acceptable manners, pointers on public speaking, and basic parliamentary rules along with the basic subject matter. The students were giving oral reports. Young Tuffy impressed me as a budding diplomat with a sunny, enthusiastic approach to his school work. It was no surprise to see him listed as the only successful Latin politician to secure support and be elected to the Winnebago County Board in 1972. He was a vocal spokesman for the Latin community. One accomplishment was his success in obtaining an interpreter in the Circuit Court Clerk's office, where legal procedure can often be confusing to Mexicans and other Latin people. He also had the height regulation for policeman altered to allow Mexicans to try for a position on the police force.

My primary interest in Mexican children came when attending school in Dennis, Kansas, several decades ago. Mexican families lived near the railroad tracks and the men worked on the section gang. The children were not attending school and many could not speak English. However, my father took steps to have every Mexican child in school within a week. The teachers were overwhelmed by the challenge at first. The young people were orderly, eager to learn, and after some hesitation were soon playing in the games at recess.

(Continued in next issue)

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