

Nuggets of History

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GROWING UP IN ROCKFORD by Arthur Alfred Thorsell

I was born on August 24, 1896, at Rockford, Illinois, entering this World on Prairie Street, one-half block east of Hall School on the north side of the street. The house was rented from the Clarks, whose house faced East Street (later called Hall Street), at the intersection of East, Fourth, and Benton Streets.

Our family moved from this location when I was too young to remember, and rented a house on a triangular lot with a white picket fence all around it, in the first block from East Street, at 802 Jefferson Street. Many years later Jefferson Street was opened to connect with Seventh Street. Here is where I spent the early boyhood days that I first remember. This triangular lot later was to be turned into a park with a circular fountain called Vogt Park, so we moved to 113 East Street, one-half block from East State Street, where we lived until my father's employer, Harry Burpee, whose furniture store items were delivered by my father, bought a small house located at 1504 Jackson Street. I recall many a trip I made with my father on Sundays to the horses located in a barn behind the furniture store, walking from 113 East Street to the barn about one-fourth of a block from Rock River.

I carried a DAILY REPUBLIC newspaper route along North Madison, First, and Second Streets for a weekly charge of ten cents per customer, but later acquired a REGISTER GAZETTE route covering all of Knightsville, then to Rural Street, Greenwood Avenue, and Jackson Street. The REGISTER GAZETTE was a stronger newspaper and paid carriers better.

Our small house at 1504 Jackson Street had three bedrooms, a parlor, a sitting room and kitchen, and in the winter was heated by a large coal stove with isinglass doors. We obtained our city water from an outdoor water hydrant, had no plumbing inside, had a cistern outside from which we pumped soft rain water, and carried it to an inside sink, which took the runoff to a container located just outside the kitchen. This had to be emptied whenever a container outside reached capacity.

This house was crowded for a four-children family. The Burpees hired



618 Prairie Avenue, Home of J. Alfred Thorsell & Family in 1896



Schmeling & Son to build a two-story house on the same site in about 1907 or 1908, and took a monthly deduction from Dad's pay check to apply on the purchase price. This arrangement continued until some years later when the Burpees celebrated an anniversary of Dad's employment by giving him the deed for the location.

No electricity was available, so the house was piped for gas lighting with Welshbac Mantels downstairs, and open gas flames in the bedrooms. The bathroom had running water, with hot water available later when a furnace was installed. It had a heating coil in its firebox. In the summertime the hot water was received from a small cast iron heater about three feet high and about one foot in diameter, located in the basement, in which a wood fire was built.

In early days the family had credit with Globe Grocery in the 400 block of East State Street, and every Saturday night we would go with Dad to pay our weekly bill. We kids would receive some candy or fruit. Meat was bought by a meat market located at East State and Third Streets. Carcasses of beef and pork were hanging behind the counter, and cuts of meat would come from these carcasses. Milk and cream came every morning from a horse drawn milk wagon. From the wagon's scoops of milk or cream, containers on the back porch were filled, with milk tickets showing what was wanted. There were other tradesmen who made weekly rounds, some selling fish, some bakery goods, and the ice man who would cut 25 or 50 pounds of ice and carry it to the ice box in the kitchen.

We did a lot of wading in those days, walking to High School, or to our places of employment, and on visits to friends, as there were no autos to take us; autos were just coming in during the early years of the 1900s. The cheapest Tin Lizzies came some years later. The closest street car from home was on East State Street, four blocks away, so walking was generally resorted to. I still recall walking through deep snow (unploughed) to attend Christmas Services at First Lutheran Church, at which I was baptized, confirmed in Swedish, and attended Sunday School in the basement of the church.

I applied for work at Manufacturer's National Bank, and was a messenger there, running Clearing House twice a day. The second grip was to either pay or receive cash needed by the banks. Many days I would take a satchel full of cash and stand on the corner waiting for a street car, to go across the river to pay, or receive, the cash which was

needed by the recipient. (Try that today!) I decided to stay at the bank, dropping out of High School after my Sophomore Year. After two years of earning \$20 a month, I decided to return to High School to make entrance requirements at the University of Illinois at Urbana. I worked my way by cutting grass, unloading box cars, and later obtained a waiter's job at a house having about 30 girl students.

World War I had started, and many of the students enlisted in the early Air Corps, which studied at Illinois, and later were sent to the new Air Base at Rantoul, Illinois. A lot of my schoolmates, including myself and roommate, enlisted in the Navy. We served in boot camp with engineers recruited from Midwestern colleges to supply Engineering Ensigns, which were needed to man the steam driven warships being built at that time.

I went back to the University when released, and was able to make the necessary credits to graduate with my original class of 1920.

I was offered employment by Robert Lind, who was a principal owner of Rockford Machine Tool Company, first working in the shop, then into Design, later Purchasing, and later in Sales. The war being over, many of our big planers and drill presses were still in original crates in Government warehouses, which killed my sales. It was this experience that brought about the founding of Mid-City Stationers, Inc., with Maynard Westring. We had insufficient capital, so Horder's Wholesale Department of Chicago arranged to ship larger orders from the factories to us so we received the shipment the next day after telephoning them. Wholesale salesmen who called on us would tell anyone who had a new line to go and see Art and Maynard at Mid-City. We obtained exclusive lines which our competitors couldn't buy, so we thrived well.

Somehow, someone gave my name to the Midwest Director of the new Rent Control Office in Chicago, as a good person to help set up the office

for an individual who had no good business background. I refused his offer, but he called Long Distance every day trying to change my mind. He finally weakened my resolve by saying that I would only have to work half days, which proved false, as I worked at night getting the office ready for opening. I offered to sell my share of Mid-City Stationers to my business partner, which was accepted.

I later took over the top director's spot after they released the person, who took leave without getting consent, but I did not take it immediately, as it would seem that I would be gunning for the position. A Chicago Office employee took over for a year, traveling home every weekend to Maywood, Illinois.

I was informed that the Illinois Commerce Commission was looking for some engineers, so applied, and was hired for the Service Division, and later took over the division that supervised all private water companies, which included many water supplies in new subdivisions around Chicago having only a single well. This caused much difficulty for homeowners at that time.

Over my span of life, I have seen streets and sidewalks covered by macadam, or covered with a heavy tar, before concrete became a choice. From house lighting with gas to electricity, from rowboats to outboards, from telephones which the customer had to crank to automatic touch phones, from no radios to colored television; from simple one engine airplanes to super airliners carrying over 200 people, to viewing space travels and moon landings, to computers and other electronic devices.

All has been with the Grace of GOD, whom I have thanked every night at bedtime. If you can't attend your Church, you can still PRAY! So, I suggest that everyone try it, to obtain HIS BLESSINGS!

CORRECTION

In the article of W. Ashton Johnson: "The Nation at War", Vol 26 No 2 Spring 1989 p 1, there are 3 (not just 1) Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Winnebago County, in or near Rockford.

Also correction: Article by Mrs. Harold B. Hyde, "Here Sleep the Brave", Vol 11 No 2 March-April 1974 pp 3-8 and continued in the following issue after that, Vol 11 No 3 May-June 1974 pp 7-8, there are 3, not 5, Revolutionary War soldiers buried in Winnebago County. Markers stating that they are soldiers of the Revolution were placed by Rockford Chapter Daughters of the American Revolution. The three are: Jehial Harmon buried in Greenwood Cemetery in Rockford, marker placed in 1902; Ephriam Palmer in Kishwaukee Cemetery, marker placed in 1906; and Samuel Campbell buried in Hulse Cemetery and grave marker placed. The markers attached to the stones of Abraham Roberts and Chester Wells buried in Twelve Mile Grove were later removed. The records later were alleged to be for men of the same names and buried elsewhere.

Mrs. Harold B. Hyde (Hazel M.), associate editor of NUGGETS OF HISTORY, regrets the errors made in the articles.

BLACK HAWK

(From a brochure about Black Hawk)

"I am a Sauk...I am a warrior...!" so proclaimed Black Hawk in the spring of 1831, only a few days before he and his followers were forced to leave their home along the Rock River forever. Though not a chief by birth, Black Hawk was the recognized leader of a conservative faction within the Sauk and Fox nations. He was a man who believed in the old ways, who fought hard to preserve his ancestral home, and who, in the end, failed to stem the tide of cultural change brought about by the invading New Americans.

Ma-ka-tai-me-she-kia-kiak, or The Black Sparrow Hawk, was born in 1767 in Saukenuk. This principal Sauk village was located along the Rock River, about five miles from its mouth. Black Hawk was born into the Thunder Clan. His father's name was Py-e-sa.

Details about Black Hawk's personal life are sketchy. He was about five feet ten inches tall, broad-shouldered, with an aquiline nose and dark hazel eyes. He shaved his head, except for a small tuft of hair left on the crown, in the style of the Sauk warrior.

At the age of 15 he wounded his first enemy in battle. This deed earned Black Hawk the right to paint and wear feathers. Time and time again he proved his bravery and cunning in battle. As he grew older he came to be a trusted leader of large war parties.

During the War of 1812 Black Hawk fought on the side of the British. He and his Sauk followers, known as the British Band, were responsible for the victories at Campbell's Island and Credit Island.

Though polygamy was freely practiced among the Sauk, Black Hawk had only one wife, Asshewqua, or Singing Bird. They had five children--two girls and three boys. Their eldest son and youngest daughter both died in 1817. Black Hawk mourned their deaths for two years in the traditional Sauk fashion. He built a lodge apart from the village proper, blackened his face, and fasted by drinking only water at mid-day and eating a little boiled corn at night.

Black Hawk is perhaps best known for the war which bears his name. The Black Hawk War of 1832 was the last Indian war fought east of the Mississippi River.

In April of 1832, Black Hawk and about 1500 followers, 500 warriors



Portrait of Black Hawk, which presumably resembles him more than does the Black Hawk statue in Lowden State Park.



"Black Hawk Statue"
The famous statue by the noted sculptor, Lorado Taft, in Lowden State Park. Not a likeness of Black Hawk, but an artist's idea of a typical Indian.

and 1000 women and children, crossed into Illinois from Iowa Territory where they had been forcibly removed just the year before. The war lasted only fifteen weeks. It ended August 2, 1832, at the Battle of Bad Axe in Wisconsin. By the end of the war approximately two-thirds of Black Hawk's followers were dead--some in battle, others of starvation, deprivation, and exhaustion. Black Hawk was taken prisoner. He was imprisoned at Jefferson Barracks, Missouri, until April, 1833, when he was taken to Washington, D.C., to meet with President Andrew Jackson. Black Hawk was then sent to Fort Monroe, Virginia.

He was released on May 30, 1833. He returned to Rock Island after a three-month tour of the East Coast. Keokuck, Black Hawk's arch political rival, met the party at Fort Armstrong. Black Hawk was released into Keokuck's custody. It was here made plain that the United States recognized Keokuck as chief of the Sauk. Black Hawk was directed to follow Keokuck's counsel and advice. Black Hawk's humiliation was complete.

Black Hawk was a tired, brotken old man. The Black Hawk War had been a disaster. Over 1000 of Black Hawk's people had died. In the treaty which ended the war the Sauk and Fox were forced to cede still more land to the United States as war reparation.

After his return Black Hawk lived along the Iowa River with his wife and children. They moved to a new home along the Des Moines River in 1838. It was here he died, October 3, 1838, of a respiratory illness. He was 71 years old.

Black Hawk was buried in the traditional Sauk fashion--sitting up inside a small mausoleum of logs. His grave was soon robbed. His remains were later deposited in a museum at Burlington, Iowa. The museum and its contents were destroyed by fire in 1855.

Black Hawk fought hard to preserve the ancestral home of his people

as well as their time-honored customs, traditions, and way of life. Unfortunately, he was born at a time when the ancient ways of his people were fast crumbling before the cultural pressure of the New Americans. The fortunes of Black Hawk and his nation were the tragic outcome of the clash of two divergent societies.

(The preceding article is from a brochure distributed at Black Hawk State Park, in Rock Island County, located along Route 5, east of Route 67. Bordering on the Rock River, this 207-acre tract is wooded and steeply rolling and contains a variety of plant and animal life. Although significant as the site of early Indian activity and nineteenth-century pioneer settlement, the area is most closely identified with the Sauk Nation and the warrior-leader whose name it bears--Black Hawk. For more details about Black Hawk State Park, contact Site Superintendent, Black Hawk State Park, Rock Island, IL 61201. For information on other Land and Historic Sites, write The Illinois Department of Conservation, Land and Historic Sites, 524 S. Second St., Springfield, IL 62706.)

ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS
Compiled by Workers of the Writers' Program
of the Work Projects Administration
(Continued from last issue)

Published in 1941

The Forest City

A little more than a century ago, one of the important stops on the 180-mile stretch between Chicago, the frontier lake port, and Galena, the booming border town, was Midway, a tiny settlement which, as its name indicated, marked the halfway point of the journey. At Midway the traveler might pause to eat wild duck or prairie hen cooked in New England fashion by the wife of one of the little group of Yankee settlers there. If the traveler reached Midway at dusk, log cabin hospitality assured him of the comfort of a straw bag in the attic for the night. Midway's principal claim of importance, however, was that it overlooked one of the best crossings of the swiftly flowing Rock River, a place where the water ran shallow and crystal clear over a bottom of solid stone. This crossing was known to Indians and pioneer scouts as the rock ford.

Today (1941) six bridges span the river where the mud-chinked cabins of Midway once stood. The ford has long since ceased to figure in the itinerary of westbound travelers, but its memory lives on in the name of ROCKFORD (742 alt., 84,467 pop., 1940) seat of Winnebago County, nationally known manufacturing center, and third largest city in Illinois. Its area, including adjacent suburbs, is twenty-five square miles. Thousands of trees -- an estimated average of 122 to each block -- justify Rockford's traditional designation as the Forest City. From an elevation the streets and houses appear to be set in a dense woods; even the business and industrial zones are canopied with foliage.

The Rock River twists into Rockford from the northeast and halves the city on a bias. Pioneer town planners laid their survey lines to conform with the vagaries of this stream. In the section that corresponds to Rockford of the early 1840s, not a single street is aligned true to the major points of the compass. Moreover, streets that terminate at the west bank of the river make no pretense of coinciding with those that terminate at the east shore. Within a distance of five blocks, three

bridges now cross the stream at different angles in order to join wayward thoroughfares.

Successing generations of city builders have had to attach their additions onto the disjointed thoroughfares established in the original plats. Thus, like rings from a stone dropped into a pool, Rockford's topsy-turvy street pattern has spread back from the river, distorting the alignment of the whole city. Streets crisscross at odd angles and run afoul of cemeteries, rock quarries, or factory yards at places least expected. Small triangular plots, landscaped by the park department, bob up where streets converge or change courses. What appears to be a most reliable thoroughfare sometimes abruptly changes its name and numbering system. Little courts and avenues that were formerly alleys or private driveways are scattered throughout the city. It is doubtful if there is another municipality in Illinois in which so many fine streets run smack into dead ends.

One of Rockford's most distinctive aspects and one that frequently deceives visitors about the city's size, is the decentralization of its commercial area. Unlike most cities of similar population, Rockford's business districts are separated. Instead of the ubiquitous business core -- the downtown or Main Street of "Middletown" -- Rockford has five large business districts, each surrounded by residential or industrial areas. Neighborhood shopping centers are scattered throughout the residential areas.

The character of Rockford's population is probably as responsible for this dispersion of commercial activity as any chance quality of site or accident of settlement. The city was founded by New Englanders and largely developed by persons of English extraction. Later when Irish and Swedish immigrants settled in Rockford they congregated in separate neighborhoods which in time came to have full-fledged shopping centers. A racial flavor may still be detected in several business districts. The Irish, who for several decades lived together in South Rockford, are now distributed throughout the city. Residents who are Swedes either by birth or extraction comprise about 40 per cent of the population. They have maintained a large degree of national compactness, as have several thousand Polish, Italian, and Lithuanian inhabitants.

Rockford's main commercial district, the focal point of the West Side section, is centered about the intersection of Main and State Streets. In this area are four theaters, a bank, several large department stores and hotels, and, at its north border, a group of churches. The public

library fronts the river at North Wyman and Mulberry Streets; upstream a short distance is Beattie Park, site of several Indian mounds. Westward are residences and, along Kent Creek, industrial plants. To the south, where a modern power dam marks the old rock ford, are several factories that are operated by water power.

Eastward, across the Rock River, is the East Side's "downtown," a commercial area that extends for seven blocks along East State Street. Here are a bank, the city's largest and newest hotel, and a principal department store. An eight-story building on East State Street, formerly occupied by the Manufacturers' National Bank, houses the departments of local government. Extending eight blocks south of East State Street on Seventh Street is another shopping area, a Scandinavian trading district distinguished for its Swedish restaurants and bakeries. The Swedish-American Bank serves this district. A fourth business zone is located on Broadway in the industrial area at the southeastern end of the city. The fifth shopping center lies on the west side of the river along South Main Street in a neighborhood that is dominantly Italian.

If these five business sections were consolidated into one "downtown," the size of Rockford would be instantly perceived, but at

the expense of the convenience which the shoppers of both sides of the river-cleft city enjoy under the present arrangement.

Editor's Note: From time to time NUGGETS OF HISTORY will print more excerpts from this W.P.A. history of Rockford. Of course the reader needs to keep in mind while reading that it was published in 1941, and much of the research and writing was done in the middle to late 'thirties.

ROCKFORD'S EARLY HISTORY AND SOME OF ITS SWEDISH-BORN INDUSTRIES

by O. M. Nelson
(Written in 1940)

Stephen Mack, a Vermonter, was the first white man who made a permanent settlement in Winnebago County. The exact date is not known, but it was probably about 1829. He was also the first white settler in the Rock River valley. He engaged in trade with the Indians, taking their fur in exchange for merchandise. He married an Indian woman, daughter of a Pottawattamie chief. In 1835 Mr. Mack took possession of a tract of land at the mouth of the Pecatonica river where he resided until his death. There he planted a village which he called Macktown. He also operated a store, established a ferry and in 1842 built a bridge across the Rock River. He died in 1850. Winnebago County was established by an act of the State Legislature of Illinois January 16, 1836. The county was organized in August, the same year.

The first white settlers in what is now Rockford were Germanicus Kent and Thatcher Blake. They arrived on the site August 24, 1834. Each of them located a claim and built a log cabin. The village was first called Midway because of its location midway between Chicago and Galena, but from 1837 became known as Rockford, presumably named for a shallow place in the river with a rock bottom where the Indians and later the white settlers crossed the stream. The first settler on the East side was Daniel Shaw Haight who arrived April 9, 1835. His cabin, built that year, was the first building on the east side. Mrs. Haight and her sister were the first white women to settle in Winnebago County. Rockford was incorporated as a town in 1839 and after a long struggle was made the county seat by election the same year. In 1852 it was incorporated as a city.

The first Swedes arrived in Rockford in 1852. Among them was John Nelson who afterwards became famous as the inventor of the Nelson Knitting Machine. When he arrived in Rockford from St. Charles, Ill., he found ahead of him a few Swedish families and single men who had arrived shortly before. In 1853 a few more Swedes came, and during 1854 and 1855 a larger number, some directly from Sweden and some from Chicago after a brief stay in that city. In 1854 the Swedes in Rockford numbered approximately 1,000, in 1862 about 2,000, and ten years later about 3,500. The numerous factories established in the city with consequent opportunity for employment attracted more and more of the Swedish laboring class until Rockford became known as one of the Swedish population centers in the United States. According to the census of 1930 there resided in Rockford at that time 10,088 persons born in Sweden and 12,243 born in America of Swedish parents. If the third generation be included, the Swedish descendants in Rockford must be approximately 35,000.

The Swedes of Rockford have taken a very active and prominent part in the upbuilding of some of the leading industries of the city. In the

forefront of these are the Knitting industry and the Furniture industry which were both started and developed through their initial stages by Swedish immigrants. The father of the knitting industry was John Nelson, a cabinet maker and inventor who was born in Kärårakra, Västergötland, Sweden, April 5, 1830, and emigrated to America in 1852, locating in Rockford the same year. While operating his own cabinet shop he worked at various inventions and after much experimenting completed in 1873 the remarkable knitting machine that produced in a few minutes a finished hose with double heel. Soon his product was produced in a number of Rockford factories and patented in United States and many European countries. Mr. Nelson died in 1883. His son, Fritjof Nelson, is now one of the leading men in the Rockford knitting industry.

The Swedish contribution to the furniture industry in Rockford had a unique beginning. In 1875 fifteen Swedish laborers joined together and formed The Forest City Furniture Co. with a capital of \$50,000, half of which was paid in at the time. Another company, The Union Furniture Co., was started the following year by the owners of the earlier company and some additional Swedes. A young Swede by the name of Per August Peterson, who had taken a course in a business college, was given the management of the business and ultimately became a multimillionaire and the leading industrialist of Rockford. He was born in Södra Ving, Västergötland, Sweden, September 8, 1846, and came with his parents to America in 1852. Here he worked on farms and in lumber camps and as a rubbish-hauler in Chicago after the great fire before he took hold of the furniture business in Rockford.

As the business grew, supported at first mainly by the savings of the workmen, Mr. Peterson obtained additional capital in the form of loans and started new companies. In 1882 he organized The Rockford Chair & Furniture Co., and the following year The Scandia Plow Co. In 1887 followed The Standard Furniture Co., in 1890 the Scandia Furniture Co., The Illinois Sewing Machine Co., The Star Furniture Co., The Rockford Mantel and Furniture Co., and The Mechanics Machine Co., and in 1891 a half dozen addition companies.

The financial crash of 1893 tumbled the whole combination of these concerns, and the creditors took over all of them for debt. Mr. Peterson refused to go into bankruptcy and took a job as a traveling salesman for three years with the avowed purpose of paying off all his debts. The banks who had taken over the factories found them a losing proposition and offered to return them to Mr. Peterson on condition that he promise to pay off the loans as soon as possible. Thus he became general manager of the various companies. In the meanwhile he purchased all the stock he could obtain at reduced price. As business began to improve and the factories gradually showed a gain, he paid first all his own notes and loans from the banks and them reimbursed all those he had purchased stock from by paying the full price for the stock.

In 1898 Mr. Peterson organized The National Mirror Works and The Rockford Glass Bending Works. In 1901 he took part in founding The Kurtz-Seeberg Action Co. and the Haddorff Piano Co. In 1909 he erected the Hess Brothers Department Store, and in 1911 he organized The Rockford Drop Forge Co. He attained a high age, passing away June 19, 1927, at 81 years, after a most remarkable career.

Another noted Swede among the inventors and industrialists of Rockford was Oscar Sundstrand, who came to America with his parents from Södermanland, Sweden, in 1882. With his brother David, he was put to learn cabinet making, and being mechanically gifted he invented machines for furniture making that led to the organizing of The Sundstrand Machine & Tool Co. For a long time Mr. Sundstrand worked on a simplified adding machine in order to produce a machine with only ten keys, and

finally succeeded and built a factory for manufacturing the same. The first machine was sent out in 1911, and the first ten were sold in Rockford. It was patented and is now sold everywhere. The Sundstrand Adding Machine Co. was sold in 1925 to Underwood Elliot Fisher Co. In 1931 70,000 machines were produced.

Levin Faust, another noted Swedish industrialist in Rockford, was born in Falkoping, Sweden, in 1863 and came to Rockford in 1887. In partnership with F. C. Hogland and E. C. Traner, he founded The National Lock Co., which in 1930 was capitalized for \$3,000,000, and employed some 2,500 people. Mr. Faust was actively interested in a number of industrial concerns and was the chief owner and stockholder in the company that erected the magnificent hotel which was named for him and was opened in 1929, costing almost \$3,500,000.

Many other industries have been set afoot by men of Swedish descent, and it is estimated that about seventy of the industrial concerns of the city are owned or controlled by men of Swedish extraction, some of these companies being capitalized for over a million dollars. Recently several of the prominent industries established by Swedes have passed into the hands of outside capitalists and corporations.

Editor's Note: This is an excerpt from a 100-page booklet (plus 36 pages of advertising) published in 1940 by O. M. Nelson. It apparently was never copyrighted, and the above material represents only the first three pages. There follow very short histories of twelve churches of Swedish origin, a half page about the Swedish-American Hospital, and four pages about Swedish societies and clubs in Rockford, after which we find the initials "H. G. N.", which probably stand for Herman G. Nelson. Whether Mr. Nelson wrote all of the first portion of the booklet or only about the churches and organizations is not known. We do know that he was an expert in all aspects of Swedish-American history in Rockford, so very likely this was all his. The remaining pages, excluding the advertising, contain over 300 short biographical sketches of "Business and Professional Men of Swedish Descent". Additional excerpts may be printed in future issues of NUGGETS OF HISTORY.

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY ANNUAL PICNIC Officers and Directors Elected

The annual picnic potluck and election of officers and directors was held at Area 1 in Alpine Park on Sunday, September 10, 1989. A brief business meeting followed the excellent meal, which featured a variety of main dishes, salads and desserts.

The report of the Nominating Committee, consisting of Ruth Lunde, Eldora Ozanne and Bill Garson, was presented by Chairman Lunde. The nominees were:

Directors - John Crandall and Sue Crandall, new directors; Florence Garson, Harold Hyde, Edward Kruse, Ruth Lunde, Darrel Mangas, and Vera Nordquist-Rabe, re-elected directors. Officers - William Garson, acting president; Hazel Hyde, vice president; Martha Mangas, recording secretary; Eldora Ozanne, corresponding secretary; Russell Carlson, treasurer, and Eldora Ozanne, past president.

The nominating committee explained that Mr. Garson, although ineligible according to our constitution to serve more than three consecutive years, will be temporarily serving as acting president because the committee's choice as president was unable to accept the nomination. The Nominating Committee's report was accepted unanimously.

Ruth Lunde reported resignations from the board by Victor Barnard, who is moving to Arizona, and by Delbert Dauenbaugh, both of whose terms

on the board ended this year. The board praised the retiring directors for their contributions to the society.

SOCIAL LIFE AND THE FINE ARTS by W. Ashton Johnson Founder of NUGGETS OF HISTORY (Written about 1964)

As early as 1841 there were evidences that Rockford would develop into a center of music and art, for Professor David Merrill came here from the east and introduced "singing school sessions".

When the Y.M.C.A. movement was launched here in 1853, the most popular course was a lecture series for which nationally known speakers were scheduled for addresses in the city's largest hall. Among the orators and men of letters who attracted capacity audiences were Horace Mann, E. P. Whipple, George W. Curtis, Horace Greeley, Professor Joseph Emerson of Beloit College, Bayard Taylor, James Russell Lowell, Henry Ward Beecher, Wendell Phillips, and the Reverend T. Starr King, noted liberal theologian of this era.

When a score of Argyle Scots met with neighboring kilted cronies on January 25, 1858, the first social club ever formed in Rockford came into existence as the Burns Club. It has met for more than a century on the anniversary of the birth of the beloved Robert Burns, the Scotch bard. The first session resulted in a gala celebration of Burns' birth in 1859. Since then area Scots gather once a year around the banquet table to indulge in toasts, song, and bagpipe music.

In October of 1884, a group of women met with Mrs. Chandler Starr to enjoy a "semi-social and musical afternoon". As a result an organization for the development of musical culture of its members was formed and named the Rockford Mendelssohn Club. Mrs. Starr became its first president and remained in this post for more than forty years. The club occupied rented quarters until 1952, when its present home was built on part of the old Ralph Emerson estate at 415 North Church Street.

Memberships in the club today are in five categories: active, passive, associate, honorary, and student. More than a thousand women of the Rockford and Loves Park area are affiliated with the club, and a Men's Auxiliary is much in evidence when elaborate musicales are produced.

Among native musicians who were featured in Mendelssohn concerts in past years were: Mrs. Corinne Rider-Kelcey, dramatic soprano; Frank LaForge, gifted pianist and composer who was accompanist for three internationally known vocalists; Mrs. Katherine Tanner Fisk who sang in command recitals with London Symphony at the Royal Albert Hall, London England; and William Heinrich, the blind tenor.

From its inception in 1884 until the 1950s, three generations of Mendelssohn Club members had cherished a dream of possessing a permanent home. Then it all happened so suddenly that musicians rubbed their eyes in wonder. Through the generosity of a charter member, Mary Emerson Lathrop, her niece, Dora Emerson Wheeler, and a sister, the late Adaline Emerson Thompson, the North Church Street site was deeded to the club. It had been a portion of their parents' estate, on which graced one of the finest Victorian Age homes in the city. Mrs. Lathrop opened her heart again and challenged the club and Rockford music lovers to match a cash gift of \$50,000 for a new music center home. Women of the club and more than a sprinkling of city-side benevolences poured into the building fund. In 1951, the goal was reached, and architects drew plans for the first club-owned home.

As Rockford observed its 100th birthday as a city, the Mendelssohn Club dedicated the ornate structure, on which, cut in stone, was an in-

scription which told all that they were entering the Ralph Emerson Memorial Music Center of the Mendelssohn Club.

Delving into the records of the Club disclosed that afternoon musicales were presented on alternate Thursdays during the first decade of its existence. Court Street Methodist Church's new auditorium was offered for the annual "gala concert". Capacity audiences filled the church at these spring features. At the turn of the century, Mendelssohn Club was housed in the 500 block on West State Street, where a store building had been erected with special accommodations for Mrs. Chandler Starr's gifted musicians. About 1912, Mrs. Lena Chick agreed to build a recital hall, practice rooms, and a balcony in a building to be erected in the 200 block of North Main Street. This was called New Mendelssohn Hall.

Mrs. Norma Starr Miller, a daughter of the Club's founder, composed a biographical sketch of her parent's lifelong interest in music and the Mendelssohn Club. One of the statements found in the dedicatory brochure follows: "My mother always maintained, and sincerely so, that her service to Mendelssohn and the musical minded of Rockford was made possible only because of the cooperation of her fellow workers." This writer can attest to the fact that hundreds of Rockford folk delighted in doing Mrs. Starr a favor. She was a great and unselfish lady, one remembered for her poise, her devotion to music, and as long as she lived, her interest in developing talent into near genius at every crossroad of life.

Other presidents of the most famous musical club in Illinois have been: Mrs. George S. Briggs, Mary Wilkins, Mrs. Elliott S. West, Mrs. Upton Bartlett, Anne B. Walton, Mrs. Glen Alberstett, Mrs. R. B. Armstrong, Mrs. Martin Nordstrom, and Mrs. Robert Dearborn (1964).

(Continued in next issue)



501-513 West State Street in the 1960s; Turn-of-the-Century Mendelssohn Club Building shown at left.

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