

Nuggets of History

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THE PEACHES: WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

by Hazel M. Hyde

Who were the PEACHES and what did they do? Some of Rockford's newcomers and the very young have missed a wonderful fun-filled experience. Rockford had a memorable team of young women who were expert professional ball players and clean-cut representatives of the community. They were a part of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League.

My personal recollections of the fun and excitement has been supplemented by DIAMOND GIRLS, a book prepared by Sharon L. Roepke for one of the reunions of players and their chaperones; conversations with Miss Mildred Lundahl, the chaperone when the Rockford Peaches had an out-of-town game; and others who were enthusiastic fans, such as Henrietta (Het) Skinner, who was undoubtedly No. 1 in their fan club; and newspaper clippings.

Fay Dancer of Santa Monica, California, was featured in SANTA MONICA OUTLOOK, March 24, 1987. Dorothy "Snookie" Harrell is quoted in this three column full-length-of-the-page article: "I played shortstop for the 'Peaches' and, unlike Faye, we had a really strict manager. We were always in our rooms after dark. Still, it was a wonderful time in my life." Harrell went on to become a teacher. Dancer, who was a center fielder for the Fort Wayne "Daisies", was in 1987 an employee of a Marina del Rey Electronics firm. Harrell remembers that she stole 200 bases with her fade away slides, and this tore her bare legs up so much she walked around permanently bandaged. A photo of this player was in LIFE MAGAZINE.

There are so many facets to the story that no one article can tell it all. Rockford is listed under "Pennants" in 1945 and 1950; and under "Championships" in 1945, 1948, 1949, and 1950. Beyer Stadium on Fifteenth Avenue was well-filled in "the years of glory" for the "Peaches".

April 22, 1987, WHA-TV AIRWAVES publication alerted viewers to the program, "A League of Their Own", calling it the story of the first organized professional league for women in the United States. The article told of the change from soft ball to become Women's Hardball. They estimated manager Bill Allington's salary at about \$75 a week.

ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR, April 22, 1987, had an article by Dave Shultz about this documentary. He states that during its heyday the league played before millions. He noted that the flared skirt and knee socks accounted for the players losing a lot of skin sliding into base. Rockford's Dottie Key, who played second base and outfield, is seen in several scenes in the documentary, and if you look quick, there is a piece of film from a game at Beyer Stadium, the "Peaches'" home park. He ends in these words, "The Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, N.Y., is expected to add a section on the girls' league in 1988."

NUGGETS OF HISTORY mentioned the "Peaches" in an article entitled "The End of World War World II" in Vol. XVII, No. 3, Summer, 1980, page 1.

In LOS ANGELES TIMES, October 28, 1987, there was a picture and a three-column, full-length-of-the-page article by Ron Berler with the headline: HALL OF FAME SALUTES WOMEN'S LEAGUE. He wrote: "The game these women played was good old country hardball. They threw knock down pitches and low-bridged the shortstop on the double play. They jawed with umpires, played hurt and were tossed out of the game."

In the section "Sports Extra", Ron Berler had a special to the Star in KANSAS CITY STAR, October 27, 1987, with the two headlines: "Baseball Hall of Fame Plans Tribute to Women's League" and "Players Help Boost Country's Morale". One statement was: "Then, came the news from Cooperstown. The museum plans to mount an 8-by-8 foot exhibit recounting the history of AAGPBL."

Sharon Taylor Roepke is quoted in "Tempo" of the CHICAGO TRIBUNE, June 7, 1987, as saying the All American Girls Professional Baseball League, a non-profit organization, operated from 1943 to 1954. "It was started by Philip K. Wrigley, the former owner of the Chicago Cubs, and Branch Rickey, owner of the Brooklyn Dodgers, as a substitute entertainment in case the men's league folded because of the war." The article, appearing under "Womanews" continued: "The league grew to 10 teams and garnered many fans, but ultimately fell victim to budget cuts and competition from TV."

In a publication received by Miss Mildred Lundahl, there is mention of the reunions that are held by the players and the chaperones. At one of these gatherings the documentary "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend", produced by Janis Taylor, was shown.

The first girl to be signed in the All American Girls Softball League was Ann Harnett, and original managers included Eddie Stumph, John Gottselig, Ken Sells (first president), Bert Neihoff, and Josh Billings.

June Peppas, who played with the Kalamazoo "Lassies", recalled the role of the chaperones that accompanied the women baseball players on the road. They were responsible for the women's behavior, including keeping curfews. The average ballplayer was only 22 or 23 years old, and the chaperones often found themselves the victims of their charges' mischief. She stated that although the off-field shenanigans were tolerated to a point, on the field they were expected to act like ladies. When the league was first formed, ballplayers were required to go to charm school. Peppas organized the first league reunion in 1981.

Mildred Lundahl spoke to me about charm school. P. K. Wrigley wanted to be sure the young baseball players reflected the best aspects of American womanhood, explained Miss Lundahl. He hired Helena Rubenstein and sent these top athletes to charm school as a part of spring training. They were taught how to walk and talk properly. Smoking and the drinking of alcohol were not permitted. Wrigley wanted to build a group that could select suitable feminine clothing and hair styles that were fashionable and becoming. The "image" was carried into the uniforms, which were designed by Mrs. Wrigley. They were short-skirted with satin shorts. Rough language was not permitted, and the young women did not wear slacks in public places. They were to avoid the image of being a man. While some girls thought the charm school was "a joke", others perhaps needed the training. Dottie Kamenshek was one of those who appreciated the opportunity to acquire more poise in making public appearances.

It is an interesting experience to be a chaperone. Some duties called for arranging doctor appointments, assigning housing or enforcing dress codes and in some respects acting as a surrogate parent. Hundreds of girls tried out in 1943 for the four teams located in South Bend, Indiana; Rockford, Illinois; and Racine and Kenosha, Wisconsin, but later there were ten teams. They came from California or from Brooklyn and even Canada. Sixty were hired as full time professional players at salaries ranging from \$55 to \$150 a week. The season began in mid-May and ended in early September, and a player was under contract to play 125 games a season. The era ended in September, 1954.

An article in the February 10, 1987, issue of the ROCKFORD REGISTER STAR, with Poplar Point, Manitoba, Canada, as its point of origin, was headed "Peaches Star Little Is Dead at Age 69." Olive Little had pitched several no-hit games and held many strike-out records. Two "Olive Little Nights" were held in Rockford. Little was inducted into Canada Softball Hall of Fame in 1983 and in 1985 was inducted into the Manitoba Sports Hall of Fame.

Henrietta (Het) Skinner in a telephone interview rapidly spun off a series of names, sometimes with positions they played that I couldn't always follow, in 1987: Alice Bollett (Deschain); Dorothy Ferguson (Key), in pig tails--both she and her husband were from Canada (Donald Key); Rosie Gachioch, right field, stayed in Rockford and worked for National Lock Company; Dottie Kamenshek, first base, was offered a contract to play with a men's team but turned it down. She got an education and became head of

laboratory in California; Ruth Richards, catcher, from Pennsylvania, went back there. Dorothy (Snookie) Doyle, short stop, was from California. Charlene Burnett, second baseman from Elgin, had passed away by 1987. Dorothy (Dottie) Green, catcher, became head of a woman's prison in Matrick, Massachusetts, a suburb of Boston. Dottie Key was a speed skating champion in Canada. Jacquelyn Keller was shortstop or second base and sometimes outfielder. Charles Lamb, the business manager, was deceased. Bill Allington was manager of the Peaches, and Bill Edwards of Central Illinois Electric and Gas Company was also manager for a short time. Carl Glans, a Rockford man, was business manager. Frank D'Agostin owned the Stadium Inn near the ball park, and people would go there to eat. Someone would call "Here come the Peaches." "Het" said, "I admired the Peaches because of the fact they were such good clean kids, which made them an attraction to the young people of Rockford."

Rick Talley, who wrote Chapter 30 of SINNISSIPPI SAGA entitled "Sports in Rockford . . . City Often in Limelight", opened his section about the Peaches with the following four sentences: "One of the most colorful chapters in Rockford's baseball history was written during the reign of the Rockford Peaches, who adorned Beyer Stadium from 1943-54. The Peaches wore short skirts and added a few curves of their own to the national pastime. They also could play baseball. Fans will remember Pickles Lee, Squirt Callow, Nicky Fox, Snookie Doyle, Marie Mansfield and Dottie Kamenshek." He spelled names correctly and told some interesting facts about an era.

Perhaps a vignette of one of the players as remembered by one of "the regulars" among people attending Rockford Peaches games at home with an occasional trip to watch a game away from Rockford is a good way to recall those wonderful times. Jessie Marie Lucas was one of the faithful fans and often Marjorie Brittain went to the games with her. She recalled a Rockford girl, Jean Cione, first baseman. She had taught with Jessie Marie. She went to Guilford High School as head of the physical education department. She had graduated from Ypsilanti, Michigan. Jean was quite a cyclist and had even gone overseas. She often comes here in the summers. Her brother John Cione lives here. She is the instructor of swimming whom people remember because of her girl students' synchronized swimming at West High School. The music marvelously matched the body movements of the exhibitions. She was a perfectionist and required much practice. It is enchanting to witness a flower-like wheel of bodies performing together. Sometimes, Marjorie Brittain recalled, they were in a chain-like formation, hooked together to a sweet kind of music known as easy listening. There were dives that made the watcher hold his breath. She had many ideas including solo performances that took much skill and control. This was the professional accomplishment of a woman who had once thrilled the well-filled bleachers as the Rockford Peaches gave good account for themselves on the baseball field.

How can anyone describe "how it was"? You got a tingle in your spine and you yelled along with everyone else when the Peaches made a score. It was a time of great pride for Rockford. We followed them to out-of-town games and it was a "Glory Time."

A FOUNTAIN FOR REMEMBRANCE by Hazel M. Hyde

Alice I. Pepper, remembered as a gracious and generous lady, was honored by the Rockford Park District and her family with the placing of a recycling fountain in the Lagoon of Sinnissippi Sunken Gardens. Family, friends, and persons interested in the parks and gardens gathered north of the greenhouse. Chairs had been placed on the west bank of the lagoon for the between 75 and 100 people who attended the Saturday, June 24, 1989, 3:30 p.m. ceremony. A bench was also a part of the gift from the family and the

park district to the people of Rockford. The plaque had not yet been permanently placed.

Edwin Carlson was the Emcee of the celebration of the life and work of Miss Pepper. Members of the family and board members were asked to stand and be recognized. A special friend, Eleanor Rush, had written a poem entitled "Alice", which was read by Hazel M. Hyde. People who knew Alice Pepper or were related by blood or marriage were invited to speak. Some of these persons were interviewed informally after the service of dedication. Everyone was invited to stroll in the gardens and partake of refreshments. Names of a goodly number of family members were supplied by Marjorie E. Thornton, wife of William E. Thornton, nephew of Alice. Miss Pepper, not having children of her own, was close to her nephews and niece.

Children of Marge and William were Rebecca Thornton and Pam and husband David Posten with their young children Tyler and Alleson. Niece Pat Ralph, Mark Ralph, Kim Millsap and Leslie Likens were present.



ALICE I. PEPPER
December 26, 1906 - June 29, 1988

Also in attendance were Robb and Neva Thornton with Mike and Jenny Thornton, Christine, Nathan, Julie, and Rebecca Sue and Tom Verticchio. Nephew Ted (the executor for Alice) and Judy Thornton brought their daughter Kate.

Ed Carlson gave this additional information: Ted Thornton came from Crystal Lake; Thomas Thornton from Medina; Robert Thornton from McHenry; and Patricia from Dallas, Texas. There were others of the family and they were planning a family reunion for the following day.

An interview on July 8, 1989, with Marian (Pepper) Lyford (Mrs. Joseph H.) whose father, George Pepper, was a brother of Alice's father, Edward, explained the Pepper, Kleckner, and Lundvall relationship, as well as the Lyford connection. Ed Pepper, Alice's father, had several brothers and sisters: George, Mary (Kleckner), Emma (Lundvall), Anna, and Ida.

Alice and Marian had attended Rockford's Central High School together. Marian's father had a milk route and brought her to her cousin Alice's house

in Rockford since it was too early to go to school. The two girls would walk to old Central High School together. There was two years difference in their ages. Before coming to Rockford, Alice had lived on Bell School Road and had attended Guilford Center School.

Lyford relatives, all of whom have remained in the Rockford area, include: Marian (Pepper) Lyford, who had four children living in Rockford, Caledonia, and Durand; and Marjorie (Pepper) Lyford who had five children living in Caledonia, Seward, and Madison. Marian was present at the ceremony but her children did not attend. Joseph Harlow Lyford is deceased. Marjorie (Pepper) Lyford and her husband Russell were among the approximately thirty-five relatives present at the ceremony. Marian and Marjorie's brother George Robert (called Robert) Pepper attended with his wife Charlotte. Robert had two children living in Caledonia and Poplar Grove and Charlotte had one child, now living in Boston.

The Kleckner relatives are: Cousin Lilah (Kleckner) Collins, whose mother was Mary Pepper who married Charles Kleckner; Myrtle Hochevar, whose husband is deceased; Margaret Kleckner, husband Clarence deceased; Lloyd Kleckner, who has retired with his wife Myrtle in Rockford, but was unable to attend; Harold and Kenneth both deceased.

Though none of the Lundvalls were present for the dedication, some of them always attend the Pepper Reunion, the last Sunday in July, held near the bandshell in Sinnissippi Park. Emma (Pepper) Lundvall and her husband, both deceased, had four children: Mildred, Evelyn, Helen, and Glenn. Mildred (Lundvall) Poppenhagen, deceased, had four children; Evelyn (Lundvall) Johnson had five children (one deceased); Helen (Lundvall) Faner, deceased, had two children, both deceased; and Glenn had three children.

Marian's brother Robert lives on Highway 173 near Caledonia. Her sister Marjorie and husband Russell have recently celebrated their 55th wedding anniversary. It is of interest that Marian and Marjorie married brothers. Many of the relatives of this branch of the Pepper family who were not present at the park were at a gathering honoring the marriage of one of Marjorie's grandsons immediately afterward.

Anecdotes bring to mind more clearly the joy of living experienced by Alice. Marian had planned a trip to Massachusetts, about five years ago, with Emma Davis, a friend from Cherry Valley. Arrangements were made with Dunrite, but Emma was unable to go and Alice took over the reservation. In Salem, these two found a Pepper Candy Store. They bought a mug and candy. They learned that by a coincidence, the store was started by a George Pepper. They told that they were Peppers. The firm is considered to be the oldest candy company in America. The mug pictured a lady in a wagon and the words, "Ye Olde Pepper Companie."

Alice sold her home on North Third Street and moved to an apartment on Gardiner. She had one sister, Dorothy Thornton, who was older than she. That explains the Pepper connection with the Thornton nephews and niece.

Annetta (Lyford) Clark (Mrs. Raymond), a former nurse at Rockford Memorial Hospital, is not related to the Peppers, but she knew Alice when they were young. They did not attend the same school because the Peppers lived on Bell School Road which meant Alice went to Guilford Center School on Mulford Road. Annetta's parents, Starr and Margaret McFarland Lyford, lived on Lyford Road so she went to Bell School. The Guilford Hope Grange met in the Guilford Center School building for many years following the building of a new school building nearby. A travel bureau is currently located in the Guilford Center School building. The Bell School building was moved to Spring Creek Road where it is a house, and the new school building built at that time is now a Rock Valley College classroom. Annetta's grandparents were Joseph Greely and Emily Brown Lyford. Her oldest brother, Joseph Harlow, was Marian's husband. Lyford Road is named for her family.

The home of Louis and Bertha Pepper, grandparents of Alice, Marian, and most of the others mentioned in this article is being moved to the Rockford Museum Center where it will keep prominent the name of Pepper for posterity.

The place chosen for the memorial fountain is one of Rockford's beauty spots. While many people visit the Sinnissippi Sunken Gardens to view the floral clock, to walk in the rose garden and to visit the Sinnissippi greenhouse, there is always a restful or festive atmosphere. Children are brought to the Lagoon to feed the ducks and swans. They can now observe the sparkling water rising and falling from the Alice Pepper fountain. One more facet has been added to charm the senses and to calm and please the spirit.

A foursome of friends, including: Alice Pepper, Eleanor Rush, Dora Winquist, and Peg Johnson, sat together at Trinity Lutheran Church and went out to luncheon together following services. Dorothy Cleland was a fifth member of the group after a time. The group is again a foursome since Alice's death in 1988. Dorothy Cleland had come to know and appreciate Alice through their volunteer work at Rockford Memorial Hospital. She recalled that Flowers and Mail was the specific area of Alice's work there and that she was always willing to give of herself to many volunteer activities.

Another close friend was Hazel Willey, who worked with her at Rockford Memorial Hospital. She remembered her as kind, generous and very efficient and capable. Alice had a real fondness for cherry and raisin pie. After working they would enjoy together the chili served at Rockford Memorial Hospital. Shortly before Alice went to the Hospital, Hazel had baked a raisin pie and she took some to Alice. When they first worked together, she thought Alice was reserved, but she came to enjoy Alice's sense of humor and the warmth of her personality. The New American Theatre plays were a favorite form of entertainment for Alice.

Over refreshments in the tent south of the greenhouse, Joe and Alice Bean spoke of Miss Pepper. Joe recalled her work as secretary-treasurer of the Rockford Park District.

Representatives from various organizations were present. Also people were invited from such societies as Rockford Chapter NSDAR who have participated in conservation activities in cooperation with Rockford Park District. Noted also were representatives from her church and from Rockford Memorial Hospital. Her love of nature and her life of service were remembered by those who knew her.

"Alice served as secretary and treasurer of the Rockford Park District from 1927 to 1968. She displayed an incredible commitment to the District's fiscal and administrative accountability," according to the flyer given to each person as they signed the guest book. This soft creamy yellow sheet had a very clear picture of her. It continued, "She set high standards for herself in her work, and carried out her responsibilities with enthusiasm.

"Her life of service continued after her retirement from the District in 1968. She then contributed countless hours of support to Rockford Memorial Hospital, Cornucopia Food Pantry, Meals on Wheels, Rockford Senior Volunteer program, and Wesley Willows Auxiliary."

Webbs Norman, Director of Rockford Park District, knew Alice when he started his first term in the district in 1955. And he can certainly testify to the impact she had on the district as it exists today.

The words of the poem by Eleanor Rush help us to feel a recognition of Alice as a person and to appreciate the life she lived. Eleanor, and Ed Carlson requested that Hazel Hyde read the poem.

ALICE
by Eleanor Rush

There is a void in my life that no one can fill
As Alice was special and IS special still.
We both liked nature and walks in the wood
And enjoyed the bike path whenever we could.
We would look for wild flowers and hear the birds sing.
Yes, the world the Lord gave is fit for a king.

Each spring she planned picnics with brunch in the park
And once in February it was really a lark.
The fall brought trips along country roads.
Where she knew the bittersweet grew by the loads.
Then she would bunch them in small little packs,
At Wesley Willows Bazaar they would hang on the racks.

Well, I cannot begin to tell her kind deeds
Like taking care of the elderly's needs,
And the surprise packages of cookies and cake
Which she was really delighted to make.
She was always first to offer her car
To get me started on my trips afar.
But letters kept me posted on events at home
While I was away and ready to roam.
So I'll cherish her friendship and thank God every day
For the trust and the joy we shared on life's way.
(Her friend and her pal)

This beautiful garden and lagoon area is regarded as an outstanding gathering place, a quiet and reflective place, a traditional place where parents bring their children to feed the ducks, a place of breathtaking beauty that can give us a feeling of peace and contentment, a brief pause during our busy lives. We hope that this fountain will help to bring joy to many of her family and friends, and all those she served throughout her life. She did indeed leave the world a better place for many of us. We thank her for that. We trust this fountain and bench will help us to hold in permanent remembrance her many contributions to this community.

SARAH ADELINE POTTER LATHROP
Mother of Julia Lathrop

Sarah Adeline Potter, who was usually known by her middle name of Adeline, was born March 17, 1836, at Medina, New York. Her parents were Mr. and Mrs. Eleazer H. Potter, originally from New England. Mr. Potter was born in Fairfield County, Connecticut, and had moved to western New York with his parents at the age of seventeen.

The Potter family moved to Rockford in 1837 and opened a general store at the southwest corner of East State and South Madison Streets. Eleazer Potter soon became very active in the community. The family were among the first members of First Congregational Church. When the church celebrated its fiftieth anniversary in 1887, Mr. Potter was post humously described as "a pillar both of the church and the community, a granite column whose firmness and solidity of character no force of circumstances or opinions of others could shake. His place in the sanctuary was as fixed and constant as that of the seasons, and his support of the gospel and all Christian charity was relied on with a confidence like that we repose in the laws of nature." In 1838 Mr. Potter served on the first grand jury in Winnebago County. In 1842 he was appointed to a committee of four to meet at Dixon regarding the awarding of deeds to land in the county. In 1843 he, along with five other east siders, submitted a proposition to the county commissioners to build a court house and jail on the east side. In that same year he served on a committee of five to solicit subscriptions to build the first bridge at State Street. When the bridge was finally opened for travel on July 4, 1845, Potter mounted a horse and was the first to ride across the bridge. In 1847 he was one of the incorporators of Beloit College. In 1849 he was elected to the first board of trustees of Rockford Female Seminary, now Rockford

College, and when money was needed to be raised for the first buildings, Potter, Charles H. Spafford, and Dr. Lucius Clark mortgaged their houses to raise money for the seminary. In 1852, when Rockford became incorporated as a city, Potter was one of the two candidates for mayor, but was defeated by Willard Wheeler. Instead, Mr. Potter was elected alderman for the Second Ward.

Adeline Potter enrolled at Rockford Female Seminary, and was a member of the first graduating class in 1854. There were seven ladies in the class, and in 1904, at their fiftieth reunion, all were still living. In 1857 Adeline was married to William Lathrop, a young lawyer who had come west from New York a few years earlier. Shortly after their marriage, they moved to 408 North Rockton Avenue, and this was their home for the rest of their lives.

Adeline inherited from her father a deep interest in Rockford College, and throughout her life she assisted that institution in every possible way. After her graduation, she continued to attend every commencement of the college through 1907. By 1908 she was suffering from her final illness, so had to miss the graduation that year for the first time. She was a member of Second Congregational Church and an active worker there. She also belonged to the Monday Club and the Daughters of the American Revolution.

Six children were born to Adeline Potter Lathrop, but one died in infancy. Two sons, Edward and Robert, were Rockford lawyers, following in their father's footsteps. Another son, William, Jr., settled in Plankinton, South Dakota. One daughter was Mrs. Anna Case, the long time head of the Visiting Nurses Association board. Adeline's most famous child was Julia Lathrop, who became an associate of Jane Addams at Hull House in Chicago, and later a federal appointee of four presidents. The subject of a book by Jane Addams entitled MY FRIEND - JULIA LATHROP, Julia began her public service career as an appointee to the Illinois State Board of Charities. She later



Rockford College class of 1854 at their 50-year reunion in 1904. Back row: Anna Allen Douglas, Abbie Palmer Buckbee, Amanda Silsby Moore, Abby Spare Mead. Front row: Louise Farnham Kent, Adeline Potter Lathrop, Marion Silsby Moore.

established the first juvenile court in Illinois. In 1912 President Taft appointed her chief of the Children's Bureau in the Department of Labor. In 1919 she was sent to Europe on a children's aid program, and she was appointed to the League of Nations' child welfare commission. Julia was considered a foremost authority on juvenile delinquency, education, juvenile court laws, and care of the insane. A Rockford school bears her name.

Sarah Adeline Potter Lathrop died January 10, 1909. After fifty years of

marriage, she had lost her husband, William, who died November 19, 1907. Adeline had been in declining health ever since William's death. Her heart became gradually weaker, and she passed away about fourteen months after her husband. "Few women have had such an influence on the history of the city as had Mrs. Lathrop," said her obituary. "Possessed of a character that impressed itself on her children, steadfastness, uprightness and abundant ability, factors that have borne fruit in their lives and will remain as a monument to her. She form a home association that linked to her the entire family circle with bonds of strength, and her passing is mourned by the children who looked to her as mentor and guide so many years."

HISTORY OF G. L. NEVIUS WOMAN'S RELIEF CORPS NO. 1

(From ROCKFORD MORNING STAR, March 19, 1916)

Youth turns with glad, responsive interest to the oft-told tales of the heroes of '61-'65. History has chronicled the deeds of bravery and heroism in the struggle between the north and south; music has cast in imperishable mold the tears and smiles, and the final paean of victory. But fifty years have intervened and the comrades of the Grand Army of the Republic have marked time to the Hymn of Peace which has been sung from the Atlantic to the Pacific. The "shields have been beaten into plough-shares and the swords into pruning-hooks" and peaceful days have ensued, together with a new citizenship.

But during the days that followed the close of the Civil War came the challenge to a new patriotism, and this on the part of the women of the North. Emulating the spirit of the mothers and wives and army nurses in the trying years of 1861 to 1865, they responded to the call for help and protection for the orphans and widows, aid for the union veterans, and care for the sick and disabled.

As the passing of the years increased and the need became increasingly urgent, and as a response to the call of commander-in-chief, General Paul VanVoort, issued in April 1883, Col Thomas Lawler took an active part in persuading the women of Rockford to organize themselves into an active force for such relief work. The women were loyal, and a number decided to unite themselves into a Woman's Relief Corps, auxiliary to Nevius Post No. 1, G. A. R. of Rockford, such an organization being effected May 9, 1883, with the following charter members:

Julia G. Sine, Mary Sanders, Jane Beatson, Kate Davis, Helen Buckingham, Lizzie Stevens, Phebe Spaulding, Lillian Brown, Mary Thompson, Mary Sweet, Josie Watson, Maggie Lockwood, Henrietta G. Norton, Delia Higley, Carrie Higley, Matie Woodruff, Nellie Wilson, Nancy Manny, Mattie Lake, Sarah Yute, Matilda Mitchell, Fannie Lawler, Laura Woodruff, Alice Sherman, Anna Blake, and Minnie Owens.

Others promptly enrolled and the Rockford Woman's Relief Corps held the distinguished position as the oldest corps in the state, and for thirty-three years it has been held in the same warm regard of the community, has held an honored place in the state, and has maintained the high plane of efficiency that characterized the early efforts of the pioneers in the work.

The first officers elected and installed by Col. Lawler were: President, Julie G. Sine; senior vice-president, Mrs. Nancy Manny; secretary, Minnie Kyle; treasurer, Laura Woodruff; chaplain, Mattie Woodruff; guard, Mrs. Phebe Spaulding.

There was no national organization at the time the Rockford corps was instituted, hence an added source of pride pertains to this society as pioneers in a work that has since enlisted 160,000 women of the North in the

largest charitable organization in the country.

Other corps were instituted in the State of Illinois in the following order, Lookout Mountain at Henry; Veteran, at Elgin; Dunham, at Decatur; Alfred Harrison, Palatine; and these five corps constituted the Department W. R. C. of Illinois.

The preamble and Article II of their Constitution states concisely the object of these women in banding themselves together, in the following words:

"We, the mothers, wives, daughters and sisters of Union soldiers, sailors and marines who aided in putting down the rebellion, do, with other loyal women, unite to establish a permanent association for the objects herein set forth, and through a national convention do ordain and enact the following Rules and Regulations for its government.

"Article I, Name. This association shall be known as the Woman's Relief Corps, auxiliary to the Grand Army of the Republic.

"Article II, Objects. To specially aid and assist the Grand Army of the Republic and to perpetuate the memory of their heroic dead.

"To assist such union veterans as need our help and protection, and to extend needful aid to their widows and orphans. To find them homes and employment, and to assure them of sympathy and friends. To cherish and emulate the deeds of our army nurses, and of all loyal women who rendered loving service to our country in her hour of peril."

The prominence and prestige given the Rockford corps by reason of the ready and patriotic response that led to its institution prior to any other society with similar purpose, has been maintained through the three decades of service, and many of her members have been called to state offices of honor and trust. It has given financial support to the public institutions carried on for the benefit of the Soldiers, Sailors or Orphans, in state and nation, thus allying itself closely to the comrades of the local and national Grand Army of the Republic.

By one of the singular incidents and accidents which is a source of regret, the early records kept by the secretaries of the Rockford W.R.C. were destroyed. With no safety deposit available the archives were left unprotected and the rodents, with no Pied Piper of Hamelin about to come to their rescue, were appropriated in a generous degree.

From the memories of past presidents and early members living, and occasional newspaper clippings preserved, the history of the local corps will be chronicled in a series of papers to be published consecutively in The Star, and will afford historical data of value and of interest to the community in general, and will be a small tribute to the unremitting service of Rockford's band of women patriots. The corps has had a special mission, and its allegiance to the old veterans, its tender care for their families in time of sorrow or need, as well as co-operation with the G.A.R. in honoring the memory of the comrades mustered out, has been a sacred and tender ministry.

Julia G. Nichols, afterward Mrs. John B. Sine, first president of Rockford Woman's Relief Corps, had been a resident of this city since girlhood, coming from Virginia. She became the wife of Major John B. Sine, of the 35th New Jersey Infantry, when he returned from the war after a distinguished service, and at the time of his death was a member of George E. Mead Post No. 444, of Chicago.

The name of Major Sine cannot be passed without a tribute to his memory, for after his promotion to the rank of major he served two years in the army of the Potomac, and two years in the army of the Tennessee, and with his command participated in all the campaigns and battles, including the march to the sea and the grand review at Washington, D.C. During these campaigns he was wounded seven times. His value and worth as an American citizen is a matter of history, and of cherished memory to his old friends still living.

Among the happy memories of the comrades of Nevius Post and their wives, are those associated with the home of Major and Mrs. Sine, which possessed a proverbial hospitality and was permeated with an atmosphere that was always



MRS. JULIA G. SINE.

alive with good will and beneficence toward the local corps and post.

The Department of Illinois, W.R.C., held its first session in Decatur, Ill., Jan. 30, 1884. The national organization was effected in the city of Denver, Col. Mrs. Sine was national instituting and installing officer, department counsellor, and national inspector, and was first president of the Department of Illinois, elected to that office in 1884 and filled the office two years.

During her incumbancy of the presidency of the Rockford corps, the meetings were held over Stearn's Clothing Store, now the C. F. Henry block. Spirits less brave would have faltered, but undaunted the earnest women worked in these cold, bare and inconvenient quarters, planning, working, sewing and mending for the needy families of the soldiers. The first effort to raise money under the administration of Mrs. Sine was an excursion on the Chicago and North Western railroad to Chicago, to view the panorama of the "Battle of Gettysburg."

The corps had dodgers printed, distributed them, and by personal solicitation interested the public in the trip, and in the marvelous replica of the battle so familiar to the thousands of comrades who thronged the building to review the famous battleground and the march and counter march of their regiments, and the slaughter of the blue and the gray. From this undertaking the W.R.C. cleared \$400.

The next stupendous undertaking for this body of women was a Relief Corps fair, held in the armory occupied by the Rockford Rifles and Grays, then known as Brown's Hall, and occupying the location of the present Charles Weise department store.

This was the first fair they ever held and besides the dinners and suppers served every day for a week, they had unique booths erected with many and varied attractions. One was designed after a fort with port holes and guns, and within the fortification was found a fine exhibit of war relics. This was in charge of Mrs. Catherine Chandler, and from this feature alone

they cleared \$50. "The Wheel of Fortune," under the restrictions of this conservative body, was not tabooed in these days, and it is a matter of humorous reminiscence that Colonel Thomad G. Lawler and Cassius C. Jones created no end of fun at that center, drew many prizes and swelled the net proceeds.

From this first fair \$500 was cleared, and suppers given from time to time kept the treasury replenished. On Memorial Day the militia turned out with the G.A.R., and on their return from the exercises of the day, the women served a dinner.

Mrs. Sine served four years, from 1883 to 1887.



View on East State Street about 1938, from the collection of the late Hazel Kluck, looking west from the 1000 block. Notice that at the filling station "high test" gasoline is selling for seven gallons for a dollar.

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