

NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 27

Summer, 1990

Number 3

ROBERT BEEBE, A TEACHER WHO MAKES A DIFFERENCE

by Jane J. Garlick

In recognition of her enthusiasm for nature and the active participation she stimulated or recognized as existing in such matters as composting, recycling, tree planting, letter writing, and learning about conservation among the members while serving as conservation chairman, the "Hazel M. Hyde Environment Plaque" was established, May 18, 1990, by Rockford Chapter NSDAR. This traveling plaque is to be awarded to a teacher who has contributed significantly to his or her pupils' understanding of the problems facing our communities and also appreciating the beauties of nature. Youth can only acquire a sense of responsibility through observing and studying. Preservation and



Robert Beebe, Biology Teacher at Jefferson High School, the First Recipient of the Hazel M. Hyde Environment Plaque

stewardship can be inspired by dedicated teachers. Robert Beebe was honored June 15, 1990, and his name was inscribed as the first recipient of the Hazel M. Hyde Plaque. Mr. Beebe will keep the plaque for one year. The following interview gives a report of the environmental work this teacher continues to perform. Robert Beebe, a biology teacher at Jefferson High School, has taught for thirty years. He received his B.S. degree from Iowa State University and his M.S. degree from Southern Illinois University, Carbondale, in biological science.

Robert L. Beebe grew up in Forreston, Illinois, a small town with access to streams and woodlands. His father was a conservation officer with the State of Illinois for thirty years. Beebe attributes his interest in conservation to his father who guided him along this line and took him hunting and fishing.

Bob's grandmother lived at the edge of town; as a child when he visited her, he was able to observe animals and birds, in particular bluebirds. (His memories of these bluebirds later manifested themselves in his teaching as recorded further in this article.)

When he graduated from college, Bob began teaching at Jefferson

Junior High before it became a high school. When it was later named a high school, he continued on the faculty and still teaches there thirty years later.

When the site for Jefferson High School was selected, Bob Beebe felt that part of the almost five acres would make a fine natural area as some of it was not suitable for field sports because of the terrain.

Bob and another teacher created a nature preserve on the grounds, planting literally thousands of shrubs and trees acquired from the State of Illinois. These were planted all around the perimeter and the center left as a prairie.

A drainage ditch runs through the property, and its banks had been scraped bare by the graders and bulldozers. This, too, was planted by Beebe and his associate, both to create natural habitat for birds and other creatures as well as to prevent erosion.



Hazel M. Hyde explaining about the reason teachers' efforts to teach their pupils about conservation should be recognized — seconds before presenting the traveling plaque to Robert Beebe, Biology teacher at Jefferson High School.

One morning after planting the trees and shrubs along the banks of the ditch, Beebe says, "We looked out the window at school and discovered the bulldozers were back, uprooting the new plantings!" He ran out waving his arms to rescue the trees and was able to save most of them.

Says Beebe, "The situation arose simply from lack of communication, and we were glad to be able to save most of the plantings."

The prairie area within the perimeter of trees and shrubs contains such plants as Indian grass, big blue-stem grass and little blue-stem grass. Beebe takes his students to the gardens of John Anderson in the area of Spring Creek and Parkview Avenue where Anderson, too, has a prairie area. "He lets me bring my students there, and they help

collect seeds to plant in Jefferson's prairie area, adding to the maintaining of the plants already there. It needs a 'burn' to promote growth. Such burns occurred naturally in the original prairies, usually stemming from lightning."

Beebe has special interest in Keith Creek as it winds its way along Morsay Drive from Alpine Road to Fairview Boulevard. He worked closely with Alderman Richard Baer, arranging to plant the banks of Keith Creek, to provide habitat and prevent erosion. This pretty little creek is home to such animals as beavers, muskrats, minks, red-wing blackbirds, mallards, and even wood ducks, right in the heart of a heavily commercial area.

Beebe's students have helped plant the banks of Keith Creek; and periodically he takes them to clean up the litter that accumulates along the trafficway from fast food establishments and especially plastic bags from some of the retail establishments.

Since Beebe was very aware that many young people living in a city do not have access to natural areas containing wildlife and forests, he wanted to introduce them to nature's beauty and wonders, to develop an interest in and love of these things, and to be observant. To achieve this end, for the past fifteen years or so, he has taken four or five students at a time on field trips VERY early in the morning, about 5:30 a.m., to Severson Dells Forest Preserve.

"Of course," Beebe says, "they feel this is a difficult thing to get up so early, but once they get out there, they usually like it. The best time to go is very early in the morning before anyone else has been there to disturb the area. We have seen as many as thirty deer at one time, and such things as mink, — not a common sight especially to the unaware and unobservant casual visitor."

Another conservation activity he has for his students is building houses for bluebirds in an effort to bring bluebirds back to this area. In former years, they nested in wooden fence posts, but there are few such posts anymore, so the wooden houses are a substitute to induce nesting in our area.

For a number of years, Beebe has worked with Rockford College and NIU as a supervising teacher for their student teachers at Jefferson. Currently he teaches biology and in recent years has discontinued teaching dissection in his classes because he wants his students to have respect for living things and feels that those who need to study dissection will have opportunity for that when they go to college.

As a teacher, Beebe promotes a philosophy of conservation of nature and resources to his students. He urges organic gardening and discourages use of pesticides.

As an example of overuse of pesticides, Beebe calls attention to the fact that birds no longer follow the farmer plowing the fields. "In former days," he says, "you could see birds following the plow, searching for worms in the newly-turned soil. With overuse of pesticides, there are no longer any worms. The soil's balance of worms and beneficial bacteria necessary for healthy soil have been destroyed, and the soil has become dead."

Other anecdotes give glimpses of Beebe the biologist and conservationist such as his account of hatching baby quails and attempting to stock them on the Rockford College grounds.

He tells of an unusual combination of ducks—two drakes and one hen—that return to his yard each spring, using the garden pool and yard on Corbridge Lane. These same ducks have returned for about seven

years.

Beebe is a member of several nature and conservation organizations: Sierra Club, National Audubon Society, Nature Conservancy, Natural Resources Defense Council, Wilderness Society, Cousteau Society, Ogle County Prairie Preservation, and Pecatonica Prairie Path.

In addition to being dedicated conservationists, Bob Beebe and his wife, Beverly, are enthusiastic joggers/runners. They are parents of three children: Molly, of Rockford, has a pet and house-sitting service called "Animal Nanny"; another daughter, Lisa, is an attorney in Fort Worth, Texas; and a son, Steven, is a landscape architect in San Diego, California.

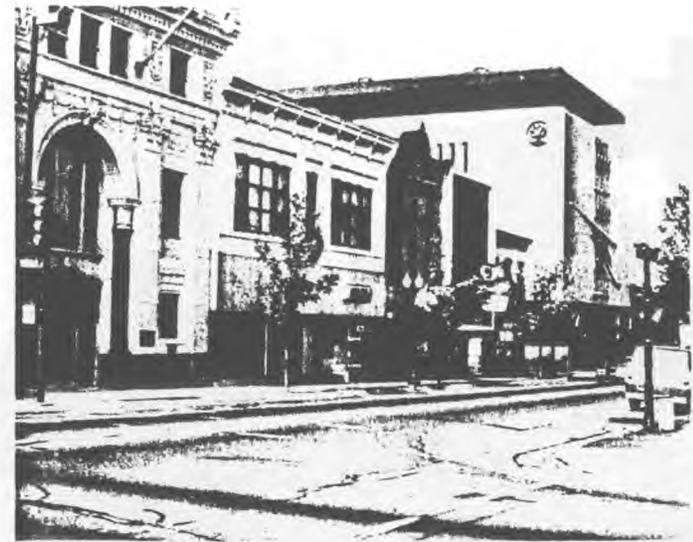
Beebe recommends a reading list for those interested in conservation and for those who need to become aware of the urgent need for conservation efforts. Among these books is one by Wendell Barry, entitled Home Economics, a series of fourteen essays. These essays illustrate that a measure of the health of the planet is economics--the health of the households. Any process of destruction or healing must begin at home. To paraphrase Confucius, a healthy planet is made up of healthy nations that are simple healthy communities sharing common ground, and communities are the gatherings of households. Another recommended author is Edward Abbey.

CITY HALL TO BE EXPANDED ALONG EAST STATE STREET Historic Buildings Will Be Razed

Apparently the Mayor and City Council, advised by various architects and structural engineers, have decided that four historic buildings on East State Street must be removed to make way for an addition to City Hall. Located between City Hall and the alley to the west, these historic structures are scheduled to be razed as soon as the properties can be purchased from their present owners. They have housed many different businesses throughout the years since they were erected in the 1870s and '80s.

Beginning in 1902, the Rockford city directories have contained indexes of streets and addresses, enabling the researcher to determine what business was located or what people lived at a specific address. In that year, August Anderson and Andrew Berg operated a saloon at 415 East State by the alley. This is the smallest of the four buildings, and the one most present Rockfordites know as Mid-City Stationers. There was an apartment upstairs, which in 1902 was occupied by Martin and Emma Babcock. By 1915, number 415 had become the Arnold Cigar Store, operated by Charles C. Arnold. Milton and Nellie Stahl lived upstairs; Mr. Stahl was a motorman on the Rockford and Interurban Railway.

By 1914 Mr. Arnold had added Martin Babcock as a partner, so it was known as the Arnold and Babcock Cigar Store, and the Babcocks again lived upstairs. In the rear was a small feed barn run by Burtis S. Edson. Apparently the cigar store had not needed the entire space, and the rear had been partitioned off for Edson's feed business. By 1915 the feed business was gone, the Babcocks had moved, the store was again called Arnold's Cigar Store, and the Stahls were back in the apartment. By 1920 the store was run by Otto H. Arnold, probably a relative of



Left to right: City Hall, 423 & 421, 419, 417, 415, and First National Bank

Charles, but it had become a soft drink business instead of a cigar store. Milton and Nellie Stahl still lived upstairs.

By 1923 there was still a soft drink business at no. 415, but it was operated by Thomas B. McLaughlin, who apparently live in the rear. The apartment upstairs was rented by Ira and Della McConoughney and their son Clyde. By 1926, McLaughlin had married, so he and his wife Marie ran the store and lived upstairs. Late in 1929 or early in 1930 Mid-City Stationers, which had been started in 1923 by Maynard Westring and Arthur Thorsell in the 300 block of East State, moved into no. 415. Thorsell later sold out to Westring, and both are now retired and in their 90s, but Mid-City Stationers is still located at 415 E. State Street, and operates a second store at 5690 East State.

The building at 417 East State was a confectionery in 1902, known as the Palace of Sweets; the proprietor was M. N. Nelin. It was later run by Arthur Hedlund and Herman Nido, and still later by Earl Cate and C. LaVerne Bengtson; Mr. Cate lived upstairs. Reuben C. Haegg then took over and continued it as the Palace of Sweets for a few years, but later changed it to the Haegg Confectionery, by which name it was known for many years. After Prohibition had ended, a liquor store named The Senate moved in, operated by Angelo Bisordi. In the 1940s an electric equipment business, known as Mid-West Electric, moved into the premises. In the middle '50s The Foto Shop moved there from a previous location, and by 1970 The Cabaret, a cocktail lounge, had moved in. This was soon replaced by Snoopy's Supper Club, which was later superseded by C-J's Lounge, the present occupant.

Probably the most architecturally interesting of the four buildings scheduled for demolition is at no. 419 East State, built in 1879 as a Labor Union Hall. For many years Rockford Labor Unions used the upstairs, but the downstairs was rented by various businesses. In 1902 the Clark Bakery was in business at no. 419, operated by Wesley D. Clark. By 1914 and '15 it was being run by William A. Clark, probably



400 Block of East State Street in Late 1969

Wesley Clark's son or younger brother; it remained the Clark Bakery into the early 1930s. By 1935 the Wettergren Real Estate and Insurance offices were located there. Charles W. Gustafson had his Gustafson Drug Store at no. 419 during the 1940s, and later sold out to E. Clarence Ahlgren who continued it under the Gustafson name. For a short time it was the George Webb Hamburger Parlor, and now for many years it has been the home of the Ding Hoe Restaurant, serving both Chinese and American cuisine.

The largest of the four buildings is at 421-423 East State. Usually it has been listed as two separate addresses, 421 and 423. In 1902 the McGuire Bros. Hardware business was located at 421 East State Street. Dealing in "hardware, stoves, and tinware," it was operated by William, Charles, Albert, and Walter McGuire, sons of Edwin and Johanna McGuire. By 1914 the Charles Jackson real estate agency had moved in, but they shared 421 with Jack Drager's billiard, cigar and soft drink business -- probably a typical pool hall. Upstairs the Peerless Athletic Association held forth. The pool hall soon moved out, and by 1920 the Jackson Agency shared their space with Swanlund Dry Goods and with Ray Mann, a bridge contractor. The bridge contractor soon left, and for a few years only the Jackson Agency and Swanlund Dry Goods shared the edifice. In 1930 the Jackson Agency was still there, run by Jackson's widow, Nellie, and a furniture designer, Frank I. Johnson, had an office there. In the 1930s Frank S. Keye joined the Jackson Agency, and for many years it was known as Jackson-Keye Real Estate. It did not remain at 421, however, being replaced by an optometrist, Robert F. Schleicher, brother of former mayor Ben Schleicher. In the late '50s Schleicher moved across the street to 428 E. State.



The Four Buildings As They Appear Today
(Obstruction at upper right is a banner on a pole.)

Between numbers 421 and 423 is a door and stairway leading to the upstairs. This is listed as 421½ East State. Until the '40s, there is no indication that there were apartments upstairs, but eventually four apartments had been built, and as of 1989 they were still occupied, at least some of the time. The most recent residents in 1989 were Mike Reio, Ruby Aklestad, Katherine Hopkins, and Thelma Taylor.

The east half of the building, no. 423, was occupied downstairs in 1902 by the Kullberg & Faulkner Shoe Store, operated by John Kullberg, father of the late Judge Fred Kullberg, and Elmer O. Faulkner. Upstairs was the tailor shop of Andrew Holmquist. There was also an apartment, occupied by Henry F. Rohkar, a barber whose shop was in the Third National Bank building. Kullberg and Faulkner continued to run their shoe business there through 1927. At various times the upstairs was occupied by Abraham Bloomberg, a tailor; William Goff, a printer; James Crosby, an attorney for the U.S. Dept. of Interior, who also lived there; and Peterson's Furniture & Rug Co. (Joseph L. Peterson).

By 1928 Kullberg and Faulkner were gone, and The Camera Shop, later called Peterson's Camera Shop No. 2, had moved in (Axel T. and Harry T. Peterson); their Camera Shop No. 1 was at 100 W. State Street. Upstairs were Celia Fassbinder's Rockford Pleating Co., and Ingeborg Johnson's and Katherine Fassbinder's Self Help Shop. In 1935 Peterson's Camera Shop was still downstairs; Frank Johnson, the furniture designer, now had his office at 423 instead of 421; and Armour H. Titus, an

architect, also had an office upstairs. Peterson's Camera Shop continued there for many years, and in the late '40s was replaced by The Foto Shop, which was essentially the same business. The Foto Shop soon moved to 417, and by the late '50s Geraghty's costume shop had taken over the downstairs of both 421 and 423. This continued until very recently. Geraghty's, which for many years was synonymous with party costumes and tuxedos, has now gone out of business. Soon Mid-City Stationers, C-J's Lounge, the Ding Hoe Restaurant, and the occupants of the four apartments will need to find new quarters. Rockford will have lost four more historic buildings, and city officials will have new offices.

IN PRAISE OF WEST HIGH SCHOOL
by Hazel M. Hyde

The year was 1940, and three new school buildings were opened: West High School, East High School, and Washington Junior High School. The pupils attending Montague and Barbour Schools in the sixth grade would have been sent across town to Roosevelt Junior High School and from there to Rockford High School on South Madison Street. They were ecstatic and very proud because they said, "We will have our own junior high school!" I shared their enthusiasm because I would be helping to open the new Washington Junior High School. Pupils from that school would leave after the ninth grade to go to West High School. While I taught 7th grade geography and auditorium, most of my classes were composed of ninth graders. In a way it was a real upheaval for students with the dividing of the old Rockford High School and the change of southwest students who would not be going to Roosevelt.

Recently the mail carrier left a large envelope with the names and pictures of the first faculty of West High School. It was with pleasure that in those mostly young faces, a person could recognize friends and acquaintances. The whole of Rockford came to know and to respect June E. Borner, orchestra director, and as the years passed the West High Band gained an excellent reputation so that most people felt a kind of kinship with its director, Allen T. Elmquist. Attending



June E. Borner
B.C.S.



Allen T. Elmquist.
M.M.

games at West High became a habit and many people knew the coaches at sight. After I became a social studies department head there were meetings "across the board" in which I came to know many instructors in that field. I was a "joiner" and met others in such groups as A.A.U.W. (American Association of University Women) and I knew the principal's wife, Mrs. James Blue in Rockford Chapter NSDAR. A number of people from that first faculty have moved away or are deceased. Just before



JAMES E. BLUE, M.A.
Principal

his death, Fred G. Weber, science department head, was my next door neighbor. The name Charles A. Beyer brings to mind Beyer Stadium. The year 1990 was to have been the time to celebrate the 50-year anniversary of that first proud year of West High School. It is sad to see the end of an era. Seeing Major A. L. Haggart's and Sgt. Isaac Smith's pictures brings sadness—Rockford has a long, distinguished history of JROTC, and it is sad to relinquish it. Active units will be difficult to regain when its worth is again appreciated.

Each year my friend Barbara (Fry) Ring, West High class of 1943, invites me to the Mother-Daughter Banquet at Court Street Methodist Church as "A Special Friend". At that time a year ago, West High was very much in the news, and we discussed the closing as a high school at great length at the dinner table. It was then that I learned Barbara was a member of the first class to spend all of their high school careers at West. Others were mentioned including Marjory Deets and Gordon Early who later married. Barbara promised to find her yearbooks



Charles A. Beyer.
B.A.



Sergeant Isaac
D. Smith

and a souvenir issue of the Owl for the 1940 class reunion. This group interview stirred recollections of activities connected with West, a school that was so deeply loved by so many people.

When the 1943 graduating class of West High School had their 40th reunion in 1983, the high school publication *The Owl* of Saturday, July 16, 1983, carried an item entitled "Then and Now", with a subtitle, "Coronado Commencement Sends Class of 1943 Into World on June 10", and I quote,

"Most members of the class of 1943 spent their entire high school career at West High, starting when the building was new and graduating on June 10, 1943.

"Unlike the large graduating class from Central High School before them who held their graduation exercises in the armory, West High graduates at that time had their Commencement in the Coronado Theater. Do you remember that Dr. Charles R. Goff, pastor of the Chicago Temple and former pastor of the Court Street Methodist Church of Rockford gave our commencement address, 'The Graduate and This One World?'

"Lucy Goetz and Jack Faith were selected by their classmates to speak at the Commencement on 'Our Contribution' and 'West High Goes to War' respectively. They were chosen from the top ranking ten of the class.

"Preceding the program the West High Band under the direction of Mr. Allen Elmquist played the 'Star Spangled Banner,' 'The Overture of the Barber of Seville', by Rossini, 'Hungarian Fantasy', arranged by Lake, and 'March Slav' by Tchaikovsky.

"Senior members of the choral groups sang 'The Blind Plowman' by Clarke, and 'Where'er You Walk' by Handel. The Honorary Musical String Trio composed of Virginia Brightup, violin, Phyllis Coretz, cello, and Richard Roe, piano, played 'Humoresque' by Dvorak and 'Cavatina' by J. Raff.

"Joan Willoughby, soprano soloist at the services, sang 'The Builder', by Cadman. She was accompanied by Miss Dorothea Vogell."

(This school paper, two copies of the West Annual 1942 and 1943 were on loan from Barbara (Fry) Ring who graduated with that first class to spend their entire high school careers at West High School. Barbara Ring also gave me several interviews.)

That issue of *The Owl* brought back a number of memories. One headline and article on the second page under "Thinking Back Forty Years" was "Schools Close for Economy Vacation, Sufficient Funds Lacking to Continue School Until Beginning of New Year". Condensing the article: November 7, 1941—All Rockford Public Schools will close for an economy vacation during the two month period November 7 and lasting until January 5. Teachers have looked back on this time with no pay from one side of the desk. Now reading the article it brings

(Continued on page twelve)

West High's First Varsity Football Team

VARSITY MENTOR



A University of Wisconsin graduate, and former coach of Baraboo High School. Coach Milo Willson showed his ability by building a strong team.



Co-Captain Robert "Swede" Gustafson showed his ability as first string end, and in bolstering the team's spirit when it was needed most.

Rockford 28	Farragut	7
Rockford 14	Freeport	0
Rockford 12	Joliet	13
Rockford 2	East Rockford	6
Rockford 12	West Aurora	0
Rockford 0	Elgin	13
Rockford 19	East Aurora	25
Rockford 12	LaSalle-Peru	0



Co-Captain Joe Buscemi proved to be a valuable man at center and inspired his teammates with his sportsmanship and determination to win.

TEAM MANAGERS - RESERVES



Coach Sabir, Willford, Zielinski, Hoer, Tarquini, Johnson, Grelko, DiMazio, Yostich, Crosby, Moberg, Coach Willson, Pizzuto, Rickerl, Loemer, Hartness, Logan, Buscemi, Flicker, Shelden, White, Gustafson, Cassioppi, manager: Atencio, Watson, C. Choppi, Rasmussen, I. Choppi, Grandlund, Cassare, Adinola, Gornio, manager.



FRED G. WEBER, M.A.



Katharine H. Obye.
Ph.B.

into focus the feelings of the students whose studies were interrupted.

Another short article was headlined "West high boys leave school to enter the service". The date of that is May 21, 1943. The yearbook for 1943 shows the service flag with the blue stars and also the one with gold stars indicating the boys who had died in the service of their country. Still another headline dealt with meatless menus at West and was dated December 4, 1942.

The oldest Rockford High School buildings were demolished and the materials used to build a gymnasium for Walker School. The article about that was dated September 20, 1943. More than three pages of this issue were devoted to a DIRECTORY. All names of the class members were listed with addresses and the changes of names for the girls insofar as was then known.

Under a photograph we find the words, "The owl, symbol of both Central and West high schools, gave its name to our student newspaper and has been depicted in many forms. It is shown here on an outside wall of the West high school building, on the wing housing the gymnasium and natatorium. How about those eyes!"

And when thinking of The Owl and the yearbook, the 1942 Annual was dedicated to Miss Katharine Obye. In part the dedication stated: "Her tireless enthusiasm as she worked to make The Publications an integral part of school life and her participation in numerous activities outside of school have proved Miss Obye's interest in higher educational standards for school, community, state, and nation. For all of these reasons the staff has the honor of dedicating to Miss Obye this second edition of the West High School Annual". The full page photograph of this woman shows her as her friends remember her.

(Continued in next issue)

NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, Rockford, Illinois

Editor.....Robert H. Borden

Associate Editor.....Hazel M. Hyde

President.....Richard J. Marsh

Vice President.....John C. Crandall

Recording Secretary.....Martha E. Mangas

Corresponding Secretary.....Eldora M. Ozanne

Treasurer.....Russell H. Carlson

Membership Chairman.....Elaine E. Carlson

Circulation Manager.....Robert J. Lindvall