

# NUGGETS of HISTORY

Volume 27

Autumn, 1990

Number 4

## OUR NEWSPAPERS, EDITORS AND AUTHORS by W. Ashton Johnson

(Editor's Note: This is another chapter written by W. Ashton Johnson, first editor of Nuggets of History, before his death in December of 1965. Mr. Johnson had intended to publish a book about Rockford history, but his death occurred before he could finish it. When reading the following article, the reader needs to keep in mind that it was written about twenty-five years ago.)

In the first half-century of Rockford's history more than a score of newspapers were launched by men of letters, several of whom left their marks as authors while going broke in the publishing field.

Only two of those earliest newspapers, the Register and the Gazette, are still remembered by some of our citizenry today, especially the name "Register" which survives in our present daily. The Register was launched in 1855 and the Gazette in 1866, both being staunchly Republican in editorial policy. Each of these publications became dailies in the 1870s. They were merged under one management in 1891. When they were merged with the Daily Republic in 1929, the masthead of the evening paper read The Register-Republic. The Morning Star, founded in 1888, had merged with the Register-Gazette in 1928, but retained its original name.

The Rock River Express was Rockford's first paper, its first edition coming off the old Washington press on May 4, 1840. Favoring the Whig political party didn't earn any subsidies, and Editor B. J. Gray suspended publication the following May, at which time the press and type were sold.

A Democratic sheet, the Rockford Star, also began publication in 1840, with Philander Knappen as editor. He sold his plant to John A. Brown on July 22, 1841, and the new owner changed its name to Rockford Pilot. Between the date of its first issue and October of 1842, Brown also published a few issues of The Better Covenant, a Universalist religious monthly. William Rounceville was editor, who transferred the publication office to Chicago before Brown became insolvent. Other early-day newspapers are enumerated below:

Winnebago Forum, with Ambrose Wight as editor, was established in 1843; it was changed to Rockford Forum in August of the same year, with Austin Colton as publisher. Elijah W. Blaisdell, Jr., bought it in 1854 and changed the name to Rockford Republican. This paper remained in continuous weekly publication until 1862. Elias Daugherty then purchased its plant and assets and merged it with his Rockford Register, which he had established in 1855.

Rockford Free Press was established in October, 1848, by Henry W. Depuy. It was a Free Soil or Barnburner paper, and was suspended in February of 1850 due to lack of patronage.

Rock River Democrat began in June, 1852; Benjamin Holt was publisher. It changed hands twice and was last published by Messrs. Dickson & Bird and Isaiah Hyatt. It was sold in June of 1865 to The Register Company.

Rockford Register was established in February, 1855, under Elias C. Daugherty, who remained as editor and publisher until June 12, 1865. The plant and that of the Rock River Democrat were acquired by a stock company known as the Rockford Register Co. Consolidation with the Gazette is chronicled in a previous paragraph.

Rockford Wesleyan Seminary Reporter was edited by W. F. Stewart as a monthly. Four issues only were printed.

The Democratic Standard (1858) had a hectic career as a Democratic standard bearer. The word "Democratic" was dropped from the name five weeks after its launching. Under four managements in three years, it was in turn operated by Messrs. Springsteen & Parks, D. G. Croly, John H. Grove, James Ticknor, and James E. and Joseph H. Fox. The last two brothers printed a second daily paper in the county under the name of the Daily News in December of 1860. Returning to a weekly publication in January following, the Fox brothers sold out to Editor Daugherty in September of 1861. His Register took over subscription lists, but suspended its publication. Daugherty had experimented with a daily for three months, June to September, 1859, but returned to a weekly.

The Rock River Mirror, "neutral in politics", was edited by Allen Gibson from 1859 into the 'Seventies.

The Rockton Gazette, established in 1857, was suspended a year later but later re-established. In 1875 the Rockton Herald was established, and is still publishing, but is now known as the North Suburban Herald.

The Pecatonica Independent was launched in 1859, but discontinued a few weeks before the election of Lincoln as President in 1860. Peoples Press, a Democratic sheet, started publication in July of 1865, changed hands in May of 1866 and finally suspended publication September 1st of that year when Editor W. P. Furey discovered that "income" lost to "outgo" in the bookkeeping department.

Winnebago County Chief, a Republican paper, was organized in November of 1866 by J. P. Irvine. Hiram R. Enoch was added as a partner in 1867, and later became sole owner. Foote & Kimball assumed ownership in 1882, and sold to D. Miller & Co. in 1886. In 1887 the paper was purchased by J. Stanley Browne, former New York legislative assemblyman. A year later plant and subscription lists were turned over to the Rockford Morning Star, with Mr. Browne assuming first editorship of the morning publication of this name.

The Rockford Gazette, another Republican weekly, began publication in November, 1866. I. S. Hyatt was the first publisher; he sold it to A. E. and W. E. Smith, formerly Indianapolis publishers, in 1867. It was launched as a morning daily in 1873, but in November of that year changed to an evening publication. The Gazette became a weekly again in 1874, and in 1877 N. D. Wright and Charles L. Miller assumed the management. Mr. Miller had been an editor at Rochelle before coming here.

Words for Jesus was the title of a religious monthly begun in 1867; it suspended less than two years later.

The Golden Censor, another religious newspaper, published on a semi-monthly basis from 1868 until 1877; then as a weekly under the supervision of Messrs. O. R. Brouse, N. E. Lyman and the Rev. C. E. Mandeville, corporate owners. The Censor grew to boast of an 18,000 circulation, only to regress in the panic years of the '90s. It suspended publication in 1896. A year later Calvert Brothers, job printers, resumed publication with historian Charles A. Church as editor. Despite a fairly healthy growth, the project did not return to "black" on the ledger, and Mr. Church found himself in sole possession of the paper April 1, 1898. Two months later the Censor good will was sold to a Chicago publication.

Leaves From the Forest Hill was the title of the first women's college publication in the midwest, being produced and compiled by faculty and students of Rockford Female Seminary (Rockford College) in

the 1850s. There were eight or nine monthly issues printed.

Dr. George Haskell, famous as a horticulturist in the early days of Rockford, and Henry P. Kimball, published the Spirit Advocate and Spiritual Doctrines, 1854-55.

In 1891 Messrs. Edgar Bartlett, William L. Eaton and Eugene McSweeney, Kalamazoo, Michigan, bought the Register and the Gazette and consolidated them into the Daily Register-Gazette, The McSweeney and Eaton interests were taken over by Mr. Bartlett in 1901, when Archibald S. Leckie bought in as managing editor. Two years later Fred E. Sterling assumed ownership of the Leckie interest and succeeded him as editor. This management remained until the consolidation of the Register-Gazette, Morning Star and Republic was effected by Mrs. Medill McCormick (Ruth Hanna), widow of a former U. S. senator, in 1930.

Many other publications were begun but were short-lived. The Christian Gleaner, Rockford Daily Journal 2 issues, Andrus Illustrated Monthly, Methodist Free Press, Curiosity Hunter, Nowadays Magazine, Rockford Sunday Herald, and Our Home & Science Gossip were journalistic oddities printed here. The Rockford Daily News struggled along with a few breaks in continuity, with D. A. K. Andrus as editor and publisher, for two years. When the June 3, 1878, issue carried a horror story purporting to be an attempted overthrow of our government by communists and anarchists, the office was ordered closed by Mayor Watson. The Daily News suspended publication in October, 1880, and no issues seem to have been preserved.

When Rockford held No. 2 position in furniture manufacturing, The Furniture Journal was an important trade publication. It began in 1888 and lasted nearly 20 years, except for a lapse during the 1893-94 panic years.

The Spectator with Charles A. Church as editor; The Weekly Recorder, The Peoples Journal, Rockford Chief, and The Journal of Practical Nursing were publications launched in the '90s with high hopes that flickered to smoke and ashes of financial failures after brief periods of production.

The Rockford Morning Star issued its first edition March 20, 1888. J. Stanley Browne was editor; Harry M. Johnson, business manager, and Roscoe S. Chapman were in active management. The operating personnel was reorganized in 1894, when John V. Riley became its advertising director. Browne remained as editor until his death in 1913, when Mr. Riley succeeded him.

In 1890 the Rockford Republican began to provide morning competition for the Star, under direction of Howard O. Hilton, editor; Harry Marean, business manager; and Will J. Johnson, city editor. Three years later the paper became an evening publication with C. Dwight Allyn as associate editor and business manager. In 1896, Messrs. C. L. Miller, Harry M. Johnson and John E. Warfield purchased the paper and renamed it the Daily Republic. Mr. Miller, dean of Rockford editors, remained active until 1910, when Robert W. Ruhl assumed the editorship for a year, only to sell back his interest to Mr. Miller and assume a magazine publishing post in the West. In 1913 Harry M. Johnson succeeded his retiring partner as president. H. W. Pollard, H. T. Peterson, John E. Bollman, W. Ashton Johnson and Thomas Barney Thompson (editor) became directors of the corporation. The death of Mr. Johnson in 1928 preceded by a year the sale of the newspaper to Ruth Hanna McCormick.

Mr. Thompson retired as editor in the '50s when the Winnebago Newspapers, Inc., purchased the McCormick estate interests. Officers of the new corporation were: E. Kenneth Todd, president; L. C. Miller,

Eugene Abegg, vice presidents; Ina B. Cholke, secretary; William K. Todd, business manager and John W. Grimes, executive editor. In 1961 Rex Carney, former Madison, Wis., editor succeeded Mr. Grimes upon the occasion of his retirement, while Hjalmer Nelson assumed the associate editorship.

Due to a large element of our population being of Swedish origin it was natural that a newspaper in the Scandinavian language be launched here. Charles Ebbeson edited and published the first issues of Svenska Posten on January 4, 1889. The paper thrived for many years under the successive editorship of C. J. Sjoström, Fred Swenson and Rev. Claus A. Wendell. Charles E. Sandberg was publisher and editor when the paper was discontinued, during World War I.

Svenska-Pressen was the outgrowth of the Rockford Allejanda, which began publication in 1872. The last named paper was edited by C. Ebbeson for four years. Under the masthead of Framtiden, Messrs. Oscar Bjork and Fred Swenson were busily engaged between 1903 and 1905 as publisher.

Despite a much smaller percentage of population, the German colony supported a weekly newspaper printed in the language of their native land for more than 20 years. John Pingle began publication of The Rockford Germania in 1885. It was a 4-page sheet issued weekly.

In the mid-nineties Ferdinand Stedinger, professor of German at Rockford High School, assumed the editorship and publication of the weekly at his North Church Street home. When Stedinger withdrew from the city for a teaching post at Omaha, Germania fell into the hands of Editor Gustave Deppe. It was discontinued during World War I.

The Catholic Monthly was launched in 1909. With the growth of the Rockford Diocese of the Catholic church, the magazine became the Observer, published as a weekly. In 1864 it was edited by the Very Reverend Monsignor Arthur J. O'Neill, with Robert Starr as business manager.

It was not until 1947 that Rockford's suburban neighbor of Loves Park could boast of a home town independent newspaper. Curtis R. West, former city editor of the Morning Star, launched the Post, a weekly. John Wingle, an experienced business office veteran newspaperman, became West's partner when Mayor Frank Larson erected the Post Building on Merrill Avenue. With the occupancy of its own home, Rae Small, former staff writer on the dailies, bought into Post Publications. The Monday Morning Mail was launched in 1954. As of January 1965, reorganization of the corporation found these officers in active supervision of The Mail, The Post, The East Sider (popular giveaway tabloid), Northwest News, and twenty-five other weeklies: Mrs. Helen W. West, president and publisher; William B. Stiles, vice president and general manager; John W. Frew, Editor; Mrs. Rose Blecker, secretary; William H. Klusmeir, asst. secretary; Upton Bartlett and Lisle Menzinger, directors.

Publisher West's death following a heart seizure at Phoenix, Arizona, on January 5th precipitated the changes in corporate officers and operation of the neighborhood publishing firm.

The High School Herald, a semi-monthly news sheet published at the original East Side High School on South 5th Street, was started in 1882 by Harry M. Johnson, and Will J. Johnson who later became nationally known for his Swedish dialect column called "Knudsen's Kolum". Harry Johnson contributed his "Story Teller's Column" in the Daily Republic for several years.

The R.H.S. Owl, launched in 1889 in the new high school on South Madison Street, is one of the oldest secondary school publications in

this state. It is now published by West High School, having been awarded to that school when the school population was divided in 1940. East Highlights at East High has earned several national journalistic honors among secondary schools since its inception in 1940. The Owl has won similar citations for excellence of format, page 1 appearance, and editorial comment.

Journalism students at Auburn, Jefferson, and Guilford High Schools, as well as Harlem High and junior high schools of the Rockford area, also publish annuals and newspapers which are avidly read by their students and faculties.

Dr. George W. Brown, who was classified as an "eclectic physician" in the 1869 city directory, was the first author of a historical work that was produced in Rockford from hand-setting type to the finished booklet. Brown, whose office was on East State Street but lived at the corner of Rockton Avenue and Cherry Street, compiled his "Reminiscences of John Brown" at his home. Abraham E. Smith who was the United States consul at Victoria, British Columbia, later produced the Brown saga. It was printed in 1880 at the request of the Kansas Historical Society.

Among the important Rockfordites who followed a literary bent are: Dr. Ruth Shonle Cavan; Arthur Chapman, whose "Out Where the West Begins" won national acclaim; Dr. James Breasted; Arthur Ruhl; Robert W. Ruhl; and Francis S. Edmison, newspaper columnist and member of the Rockford Writers Guild. Dr. Cavan wrote several textbooks for college level students on behaviorism and criminology. On the latter subject, Dr. Cavan did research in Europe and this country through visitation at scores of penal institutions.

Arthur Chapman, a native of Rockford, followed an interesting career as a newspaper reporter, columnist and syndicated writer in Denver, following an apprenticeship in Rochelle. Arthur Ruhl, eldest son of Antes S. Ruhl, a well-known industrialist identified with knitting and textile trade for over fifty years, was a noted war correspondent for Collier's Magazine. His brother, Robert, earned the Pulitzer prize in journalism while publishing a Pacific coast newspaper and magazine.

Francis S. Edmison was known throughout the state as the author of "Frankly Speaking", a daily feature of the Register-Gazette and Register-Republic. Excerpts from columns were incorporated in booklet form at year end for a decade.

To Ann Marshall Wiley goes the credit for having launched the Rockford Writers Guild in 1947, composed of 35 local poets and writers of prose. A few years previously, Miss Amy Hollem of West High School's English department had founded an annual poetry exhibit and competition at the Rockford Art Association. Among the contributors whose literary efforts were expressed in the annual volumes were: M. Elizabeth Weinschenk, Luman W. Colton, Dr. Charles Parker Connolly, Mrs. Wiley, Theresia Zack Hanitz, Miss Hollem, Elizabeth and Florence Roberts, Vera Dell Jacobson, Malcolm McFadyen, Junita Carpenter Robinson, Laura Hatch Howell, Edith Andrews Burchell, Evelyn Johanson Boettcher and John W. Grimes.



Amy I. Hollem, M.A.  
English  
Honorary Member, Society

## IN PRAISE OF WEST HIGH SCHOOL

by Hazel M. Hyde

(Continued from last issue)

The "Glory Days" of basketball were recalled by John Wessels, a member of the championship team that was coached by Alex Saudergas at West High School, in an interview, April 9, 1990. He spoke of the players who had come from Washington Junior High School. The team gets together from time to time. John had been from Roosevelt Junior High School. After his school days he had played professionally for a short time.

The Washington group of players had been in my classes and were enthusiastic young people capable of "keeping their grades up". John recalled that the gymnasium at West High School was named for Alex Saudergas. Alex had been a co-worker with me at Washington before his

days at West, and we both had lived on Burton Street before he and Alice moved with their family to their present home. It was no wonder that game times at West found my father and me seated in about the same place time after time. Beulah Slaughter, mother of Don, had also been a co-worker at Washington.

Talking with Alex Saudergas on April 17, 1990, I asked for the starting lineup for the championship teams. The starting five of the 1955 team were Rex Parker, Captain, Rod Coffman, Fred Boshela, Nolden Gentry, and John Wessels. Others on the 1955 team were Don Grabow, Ray Manlon, Bob Washington, Dave McClelland, and Tom Olson. Starters in 1956 were Don Slaughter, Bobby Washington, Tom Blake, Nolden Gentry, and John Wessels. Three of these, Gentry, Slaughter, and Washington

### Some of West High School's Original Faculty



**HARRY W. KROLL, M.A.**

Employment Director  
Industrial Department

Receiving an average of twenty phone calls a day, Mr. Harry Kroll, West's employment director, has been successful in securing jobs for three-fourths of the boys graduating from trade shop courses. Besides these, he has placed nearly all of the boys and girls who have applied to him for full- or part-time work in stores, homes, or offices. Desiring to fit as many West high graduates as possible into their proper occupations, Mr. Kroll encourages pupils to talk to him about their vocational questions.



**JOHN T. HAIGHT**

NYA Director  
Commercial Department

Throughout the twenty years in which he has had charge of the band, monitors, and NYA work, as well as teaching in the commercial department, Mr. John T. Haight's friendly philosophy has won him the admiration of everyone. This year, as director of the school's NYA program, he has helped many students to obtain a high school education by giving them part-time work in the school. Mr. Haight's efforts have also been responsible for the monitors' efficient work in keeping order in the halls.



**FLORENCE M. FOSTER**

Registrar

As registrar of West high, Miss Florence Foster keeps a accurate job of a student's record from his first day at school when he registers with her, to the day that she issues the report saying that he has enough credits to be graduated. Her records follow a student even after graduation, being often referred to by prospective employers and college officials. In spite of her many duties, Miss Foster seems always to find time to answer a student's question or to chat pleasantly with a teacher or alumnus.



**Gene Alberstett, B.E.**  
Social Studies

**Helen Barlaas, B.A.**  
Mathematics

**Glen Batesole, M.A.**  
Mathematics  
Athletic Association  
Track Supervisor

were previously from Washington Junior High School. Don is a PhD and Nolden a lawyer. Nolden's son, a very tall boy, came to live with his grandparents in Rockford and attends Boylan High School. Others on the 1956 championship team were Jack Flynn, Roscoe Burke, Joe DiGiovanni, and Chad Coffman, according to John Wessels.

Coach Saudargas said, "The 1967 team won 28 games in a row and was also a great team, but nobody will remember that. From the very first week of 1955 our team was rated number 1 in the state of Illinois and again in 1956 the team was number 1 in the state. That was unusual."

Alex Saudargas discussed with me his career moves from Morris Kennedy School to Seward High School, Washington Junior High School in

1943 and 1944, then to East High School, to Roosevelt Junior High School and to West from there. He is a charter member of the Hall of Fame of Basketball located in Bloomington, Illinois. On April 28 he went to Bloomington to induct the 1939 state championship team into the Hall of Fame. Mrs. James Laude, age 84, from Milwaukee also attended the ceremony and banquet, as did Stan Stasica of that 1939 championship team from Rockford High School, who came all the way from Denver.

Under the title, "West High's Last Maypole Mixes Cheers, Tears", in Rockford Register Star, Barbara Dilley, West Class of 1963, who remembers participating in the May Festival more than twenty-five years ago, was quoted as saying, "This is such a beautiful ceremony. It's so sad to know it will close, and this will be over. It's like losing a childhood memory."

Karen Letheby, class of 1969, helped to weave the Maypole for two years and hates to see the school close and the traditions end. Present at that last ceremony, former Rockford (1974-1984) School Superintendent, Class of 1941, Mr. Arthur T. Johnson, had missed very few of West's 49 consecutive May Festivals. His comment: "It's been a great institution, but it's the people who made it great."

And again using the local newspaper as a source, Cathy Ward reported in the April 17, 1990, issue that with the aid of former West High teacher, Deanna Mulcahey, who had served as choreographer for six years and former performers and supporters, the Maypole Dance will be given this year in Victorian Village on May 5 and 6. The sixteen



Elsie Beatty, M.A.  
English  
A.B.L. Adviser



George Berg, B.E.  
Industrial



Elta N. Brown, B.A.  
Mathematics  
Sophomore Adviser



Mary H. Brown, B.S.  
Social Studies  
Department Head



Maxine Ollman, B.A.  
Social Studies  
8-5-5 Club Adviser



Elizabeth F. Pearson,  
B.A.  
English  
Dramatic Club



Colonel Ernest Pell  
Military Science



Pearl L. Geddes,  
M.A.  
English  
Civitan Club



Mildred Greenlee,  
M.A.  
Social Studies



Henning E. Hanson,  
M.S.  
Science  
Photography Club

Alfred Sabin, M.A.  
Industrial  
Civitan Athletic  
Coach



Lena R. Scandroll,  
M.A.  
Foreign Languages  
Debate Coach



George Fell, M.S.  
Science



Isabel Fisher, B.A.  
Foreign Languages  
Department Head



Ruth S. Foster, B.S.  
English

G. Maxine Smith,  
M.S.  
Science



Sam W. Tracy, M.A.  
Social Studies  
Athletic Coach



## 1940-41 West High School Basketball Team



The only Central high letterman coming to West, Bob Gustafson (above), appointed captain the start of the season, proved to be an inspirational and fighting leader for the team.

## SCHEDULE

Rockford 22	Belvidere	29
Rockford 18	Oregon	34
Rockford 18	Rockford East	45
Rockford 21	West Aurora	22
Rockford 22	Dixon	34
Rockford 27	LaSalle-Peru	46
Rockford 21	Belvidere	19
Rockford 26	Joliet	28
Rockford 19	Freeport	29
Rockford 9	Rockford East	44
Rockford 25	Elgin	37
Rockford 15	LaSalle-Peru	13
Rockford 27	East Aurora	26
Rockford 24	Freeport	40
Rockford 34	Sterling	44

### Regional Tournament

Rockford 46	Harlem	23
Rockford 33	Winnebago	20
Rockford 41	Rockford East	47

### Sectional Tournament

Rockford 28	Dixon	40
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A senior, Burnie Bailey (above) was an efficient and valuable assistant to Coach Sam Tracy as head manager, always ready to handle the tasks that complete the squad's functioning.

## CONSCIENTIOUS CAGERS



(Back row) Bailey, Coach Tracy, Johnson, Lundeen, McCrudden, Alia, Salvi, Mitchell.  
(Front) Massetti, Buscemi, Tarquini, Gustafson, Forbes, Vaughn, Cuppini.

## 1955 West High School Championship Basketball Team



BACK ROW: T. Olson, J. DiGiovanni, F. Boshela, N. Gentry, J. Wessels, D. Slaughter. SECOND ROW: D. Reed (manager), D. McClelland, J. McCoy, S. Black, S. Patton, B. Ream (manager). FRONT ROW: Coach A. Saudargas, R. Washington, L. Bedford, R. Parker, R. Morgan, R. Binger.

volunteer performers are former West students now attending other high schools.

The basic purpose of any school is to educate the young people who attend. West faired well in debate and other areas and the teachers were well qualified. It was racially integrated and offered quality education to its students.

An interesting question about both students and instructors is "What are they doing now?" Lucy Goetz Eklund, who married her classmate Jerry Eklund, is still active in civic and cultural affairs. Checking Lucy's pictures in the yearbook, there was a surprise under "Typical Activities". It read "Each year every senior home room nominates three girls as their representatives in the D.A.R. (that's Rockford Chapter DAR) contest. A student committee then selects the three girls most often nominated, and the seniors vote on those three. Lucy Goetz, Jill Floden, the runners up this year (1943) are shown as they congratulated Polly Stone, the winner. Polly was given a chance for a trip to Washington under the auspices of the D.A.R." Beside being a volunteer at the Rockford Museum Center, Lucy is presently on the Board of Rockford Chapter Of Lyric Opera of Chicago, a group that arranges bus trips into Chicago to attend operas each year as well as

1956 West High School Championship Basketball Team



BACK ROW: T. Urnezis, R. Olson, J. Heath, R. Peacock, C. Johnson, C. Coffman. SEC-  
OND ROW: G. Corone, S. Patton, D. Seidelmann, C. Peebles, J. Flynn, R. Burke, B. Wolff (manager). FRONT  
ROW: T. Blake, N. Gentry, J. Wessels, D. Slaughter, R. Washington, Coach A. Sauld-  
gas.

providing previews of the operas to be given. Lucy was associated with The Owl all three years, being associate editor of the very first "Owl" school publication. West had stirred her interests in many fields and she still contributes her talents in the community.

"Helen Armstrong, a West Alum", wrote Leona Carlson in The Rockford Register Star, January 4, 1990, "took her Armstrong Chamber Concerts, Inc. to new heights, presenting violin superstar Itzhak Perlman in a benefit concert with Henry and Nancy Kissinger as honorary chairman and chairwoman in Washington, Connecticut."

Karen Van Howe, West Class of 1969, became a French teacher there and said when West High School closed its doors for the last time, June 5, 1989, according to Rockford Register Star, August 27, 1989: "I have taught in other schools, and none of them has been a family like West."

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