

NUGGETS of HISTORY

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HOW ROCKFORD SCOTS GOT TOGETHER by G. Douglas Nicoll, Ph.D. History Dept., Beloit College

The Scots who came to America were among the "invisible immigrants", those English-speaking Europeans who could blend into the majority with relative ease. Although they may not have lost their Scottish identities in the eyes of some of their neighbors, they had to strive with no less vigor to maintain an awareness of their origins at the same time that they became "American". This fact may have been somewhat less true in rural areas, where immigrants from a common homeland often clustered and were members of the same church congregation. But in urban areas, where integration often was easier, a clear effort may have been necessary to maintain one's identity with the "auld sod".

Midwest towns and cities in the nineteenth century provide clear examples of this phenomenon, and Rockford, Illinois, was no exception. In the nearby village of Caledonia, where Scottish farmers primarily from Kintyre congregated and founded the Willow Creek Presbyterian Church and dominated its membership, they had little difficulty in remembering their heritage and preserving a degree of their Scottish culture. But in the urban center of Rockford, where Scots, some farmers, some craftsmen, some businessmen, mingled with Americans and immigrants of various backgrounds, a greater effort was needed.

The 1850 census recorded only 49 Rockford inhabitants of Scottish birth. There were almost twice as many native Scots living in the town of Caledonia at that time and many others in Winnebago and Boone counties. Ten years later the number of Rockford Scots was 189, and it was during this period that this growing urban Scottish community sought to organize itself for social purposes for the first time. After an initial false start, the Rockford Burns Club emerged, founded in November 1858, the city's oldest continuous social organization and one of the oldest Burns Clubs in the United States.

Scottish immigrants around the world have tended to establish social associations to preserve their national heritage. They formed St. Andrew's societies and used St. Andrew's Day, November 30, as the focal celebration of their Scottish traditions, and they founded Robert Burns clubs and used the famous poet's birthday, January 25, as their annual festival, although this delineation did not necessarily continue. As American culture became increasingly secularized, St. Andrew's Day lost much of its meaning. Eventually, many St. Andrew's societies began to celebrate Burn's birthday as their primary festival. The "false start" in Rockford was an example of the first approach, while the more successful and lasting effort was obviously an example of the second.

The record is a bit vague, but in November, 1855, or somewhat earlier, the Rockford St. Andrew's Society was founded to celebrate the Scottish patron saint's day that year. This first banquet turned out to be unquestionably the most exciting event in the young society's history and came very close to being its last.

A reported 300 persons attended the gala, including many "who rarely attend public social gatherings." The usual format for such assemblies was to follow dinner with a program beginning with words of welcome from the organization's president and then a series of responses to toasts, each commemorating some aspect of the Scottish-American heritage. "Noise and confusion" began with the initial address and continued throughout the evening, causing the President to frequently

call for the restoration of order. One reporter noted that the speeches were too long, but another described the scene as one "that would disgrace a brothel....broken up by a few drunken men for no earthly reason." The two newspaper accounts of the event differ as to just when a crescendo was reached. It was either during the response to a toast to "the common schools of America" or during a local editor's praise of the "the Press". The disorder caused by the hecklers led to "one or two perhaps indiscreet threats" and "a general fracas (sic), which broke up the proceedings" before the program could be completed.

The newspaper accounts of the evening were indignant over the manner in which an otherwise respectable gathering had been dissolved, but the leaders of the St. Andrew's Society were undaunted. They held a second annual banquet the following December 1, the Sabbath preventing a gathering on the Saint's day. Despite bad weather, over 100 attended what proved to be both a sedate and a successful celebration. Even though this second gathering was more like that envisioned by the founders, there is no record of another St. Andrew's Society banquet.

One week after all mention of the St. Andrew's Society disappeared from the press, the Rockford Burns Club, "composed of sons of Auld Scotia," replaced it among the associations listed in the Rockford Register. On the evening of November 5, in the Jeffersonian debating rooms over W. C. Prouty's store on West State and Wyman, the founders organized themselves and elected William McGregor, a Rockford carpenter, as their first President and John Belford, a baker, their Secretary. Many years later it was claimed that there were thirty-six charter members of the club, but there is no direct evidence of this fact. The founding members drafted a very thorough constitution and bylaws, which stood without amendment until 1915. Membership in the club was to be limited to "none but Scotchmen, the sons or grandsons of Scotchmen" over 18 years of age. There was to be an initiation and library fee of two dollars, and annual dues were set at one dollar. It appears that nineteen charter members affixed their signatures to the document. They also immediately began to lay plans for the centennial of Robert Burns' birth, posting a notice in the newspaper that "the descendants of merry old Scotland will hold a meeting on Friday, November 26, at Warner's Hall, at State and Main, to make preparations for celebrating the birth-day of Robert Burns."

William McGregor, who had been elected the first president, was a Scottish-born carpenter. In the 1860 census his age was listed as 31. He was later widowed and left with six daughters when his Scottish-born wife, Ann, died. He continued to be active in the Burns club into the 1870s, serving as vice president in 1875. The first secretary, John Belford, was also Scottish-born, and was 34 years old in 1860.

On the evening of January 25, 1859, about 200 persons gathered in the gaily-decorated dining room of the Holland House for a sumptuous banquet followed by responses to a series of toasts, interspersed with various renditions of Scottish music. The decorum of the festival evidently remained "respectable" throughout, for with the memory of the first St. Andrew's Society banquet still in mind, the Rev. Thomas G. Smith, 30-year-old Scottish-born pastor recently called to the Willow Creek Church, concluded his remarks "to the memory of Robert Burns" by commending the Burns Club for having banned liquor from its banquet, "contrary of all precedent, (lifting) the banner of Temperance over its festive hall for the first time." Shortly after midnight all present joined hands to sing "Auld Lang Syne", the banquet hall was cleared, and dancing ensued far into the "wee hours ayont the twal". Thus began

a series of annual Robert Burns banquets which continues to the present.

THE WATER POWER

Editor's Note: This is another excerpt from the W.P.A. booklet entitled ROCKFORD, ILLINOIS, compiled by workers of the Writers' Program of the W.P.A., written in the 1930s as part of the government's effort to put people to work during the Great Depression. The last excerpt was in the Spring issue of 1990.

Although the founders of Rockford staked the future of the community on the assumption that the settlement would thrive as a river port and shipping point, the upstream cruise of the "Gipsy" in 1838 and a similar voyage by the "Lighter" in 1844 were the only instances in which the Rock River was navigated by steamboats. The rapids and shoals between Rockford and Rock Island were hazards that checked even the most daring captains.

The early 1840s were marked by numerous unavailing attempts of settlements in the Rock River Valley to obtain government aid for dredging a deep channel. The channel was improved in 1845, but not enough to encourage navigation. In 1846 there was unsuccessful agitation for a ship canal to join Lake Michigan with the Rock River; two years later, when work was begun on a railroad between Chicago and Rockford, the question of improving the Rock River became relatively unimportant.

In 1843 the general assembly enacted a bill providing for the formation of the Rockford Hydraulic and Manufacturing Company. In 1845 the company completed a dam of brush and stone with a framework of wood near the foot of Park Avenue. Millraces were dug on both sides of the river. Gregory, Phillips and Daniels built a sawmill at the head of the race on the east side; Thomas D. Robertson and Charles I. Horsman built a sawmill on the opposite side at the head of the race; and Wheeler and Lyons operated a third sawmill on the east side at Walnut Street. Moses Nettleton opened a grist mill on the south side of State Street in 1846, and Orlando Clark started a water-powered iron foundry.

On September 3, 1847, Ho-no-ne-gah, wife of Stephen Mack, died at the age of 33. Announcement of her death in the Forum concluded with the following observation: "Another disciple of Christ has gone to her reward and while her family and friends deplore their bereavement on earth, angels greet her in heaven."

Mack died at the age of 52, on April 10, 1850. In the last days of life he was a civic leader and an associate justice of the county court of Winnebago County.

By 1850 Rockford had more than conquered its first obstacle, the struggle to become a self-sustaining community. But inhabitants reared in the cultured East wanted more than that. There was a need for better schools, better streets and sidewalks, and local laws to provide for sanitation. Nascent industries required adequate transportation to obtain raw materials and to send their products to outside markets. These were pressing problems to which the fifties brought at least a partial solution.

(To be continued in next issue)

GREENWOOD CEMETERY TOUR

Instead of our usual spring tour to a historic area, on June 2, 1991, the Rockford Historical Society presented "A Walk Through Rockford History" at the Greenwood Cemetery, corner of North Main and Auburn Streets. The cemetery tour began at 2 p.m. and lasted until 5 p.m.

A similar tour was held at Greenwood on May 25, 1969, led by the late Stuart K. Golding. There was a difference, however. In 1969, Mr. Golding led the entire group, consisting of about 50 people, to each of the twenty graves on the tour, and he gave a short talk about each one.

This year various people from the community, most of whom are members of the Rockford Historical Society, portrayed historic citizens from Rockford's past. Each of these interpreters would remain at one grave site and lecture to the groups as they came by. The interpreters spoke in the first person, pretending to be the individual buried at the site. An excellent brochure was prepared by past president William Garson, and each person attending received a copy; it contained comments about each of the 25 historic personages whose graves were visited, and a map of the cemetery showing where each grave is located. Richard Marsh, president of the Rockford Historical Society, estimated that approximately 500 people attended the event.

The historic individuals represented, and their interpreters, were as follows: Blanche Ellis Starr; Suzanne Crandall; John Beattie; Kenneth Crandall; Sheriff John F. Taylor; Russell Miller; James Henry Breasted; Gordon Sunderman; Thomas D. Robertson; Betsey Slabaugh; John P. Manny; Dr. John A. Howard; John H. Manny; Robert H. Borden; William A. Knowlton; Grace Grimmit; Mrs. Duncan P. Forbes; Barbara Horn; Lewis Lemon; Ernie Webster; Anna Peck Sill; Gretchen Kreuter;



Sue Crandall as Blanche Starr



Russell Miller as Sheriff
John F. Taylor



Gordon Sunderman as
James H. Breasted

Julia Lathrop; Eleanor Marsh; Mr. & Mrs. Levi Rhoades; Robert and Phyllis Sio; Mr. & Mrs. William A. Talcott; Ralph and Pauline Fry; Gilbert Woodruff; Jim Duhigg; Dr. Elisha C. Dunn; Jack Crandall; Robert H. Tinker; George Harnish; Mrs. Henry Freeman; Carol Harnish; Dr. & Mrs. George Haskell; Genevieve Taxon; Shepherd Leach; Marilyn Engen; Thatcher Blake; Rev. Robert Engen; William & Edward Ziock families; Diane Meltmar; Mr. & Mrs. Ralph Emerson; Lynn Rodé; Harry & Della Trufant Burpee; Esther Crandall; and Otis Eddy; Jack Baxter.



Betsey Slabaugh as
Mrs. Thomas D. Robertson



Dr. John Howard as
John P. Manny



Robert Borden as
John H. Manny



Eleanor Marsh as
Julia Lathrop

THE LADY BACK OF LEE
by Frances Burr Braur
(Continued from last issue)

Behind the counters of the Nut Hut was the 'Hut', a mock log cabin made out of real logs with cedar shake shingles. Through the doors could be seen the cooking racks and pans for the salted nuts, the workbenches for the many delicacies such as stuffed dates, and the stoves and ovens which Lee Burr used to prepare the nuts. Mr. Burr always wore a white long-sleeved shirt with the sleeves rolled up, a white butcher's apron, and was remembered with a thick potholder in one hand and a large metal spoon in the other, coming to the front of the store to be sure every customer was waited on promptly.

"May I help you?" was the usual greeting of the clerks. That was also the greeting of Mrs. Burr. Whenever she was needed to "help" at the store during the noon break and in the busy afternoon hours, Irene was there. Customers enjoyed having this lady wait on them. And lady she was. Tall, neat with natural wavy gray hair, almost regal in carriage, she was a typical volunteer lady of the day. Irene Burr was active in the Red Cross, in Rockford Woman's Club, her church groups, especially Circle 13 of the Congregational Church where she was also a deaconess.

Perhaps one of dearest interests was the Rockford chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. For several years she was chairman of their scholarship committee. She was Regent for several terms, and was privileged to go to the National D.A.R. congress in Washington, D.C. Irene was daughter of a Real Granddaughter of the American Revolution. Her mother, Etta Stanbro Cleveland, was one of the first D.A.R. members in Rockford. Etta's grandfather was drummer boy during the war.

Irene was responsible for the bright crisp orange colored smocks worn by the clerks in the Candy and Nut Hut. She made the orange voile curtains at the windows of the log cabin. She had done so much entertaining with her mother and two sisters that customers welcomed her suggestions for delicacies to serve at their own parties. The Candy and Nut Hut offered many tempting tid-bits for bridge, teas, receptions. Tiny satin kisses in a dozen pastel colors, each color a different flavor, gaily colored chocolate-filled jackstraws, jordan almonds, and of course nuts for the nut cups.

For most entertaining she recommended mixed salted nuts. These could be a mixture that included blanched peanuts, pecans, almonds, brazil nuts, and cashews. It could also be a mixture without peanuts which had pecans, blanched almonds, filberts, brazil nuts and cashews. Or it could be the de-luxe mixture chosen for wedding receptions, formal dinners, and holiday gifting. Also available were salted pistachios and pignolia or pine nuts. Pistachios came in salted-shell, with a thick salty brine coating the shell, and peanuts in the shell were found either plainly roasted or salted in the shell. Good but messy. It was fun to crack open the end of the peanut shell and use them for kids' earrings.

The Candy and Nut Hut was the largest retail and wholesale establishment out side of the Chicago downtown loop. Most of the bakeries in Rockford had standing orders for broken pecans, English walnuts, black walnuts, imported dates, and candied fruit. Penny peanut machines found in most of the factories, drug stores, and pool parlors were filled by salesmen who bought their nuts there.

Speaking of salesmen, representatives of all the major candy companies stopped at the Candy and Nut Hut for an order to be delivered later. The 3 B's, Bunte's, Brock's, and Beich's, all vied with each other when showing their sample delicacies for the trade. Sweets from all over the country and the world were to be found in the store. Vermont maple sugar molded in the shape of maple leaves, windmills, and the proverbial lads and lasses. Pure maple syrup in jugs, and pound cakes of maple sugar were for sale. Allegretti chocolate ting-a-lings from San Francisco, pecan pralines from New Orleans, candied violets from France, and rock candy crystalized on strings were in the showcases.

A candy-maker was hired for the store and a large candy kitchen was furnished for him in the back end of the warehouse space of the store. Burnished copper kettles were used to cook the bubbling batches of peanut brittle. Poured onto marble slabs the candy quickly hardened to the brittle stage. Several types of this were made, one including redskins and coconut.

Another hone-made candy was fudge. Chocolate, vanilla, filled with nuts, you name it, the candy man made it. One of his most famous concoctions was the caramels. These were made with pure cream added to the already caramelized sugar. Some of this delicious goody was poured into wooden forms on the marble slabs, allowed to cool slightly, then cut into squares. Some of the caramel was used for caramel apples. The Burr family made a trip to the apple orchards in Wisconsin every fall

and not only brought home bushels of apples but arranged for many more to be delivered throughout the season. Each apple was dipped in hot caramel sauce, then as if that was not quite good enough, each caramel was rolled in crushed salted peanuts. School pep clubs ordered these by the hundreds for their money making projects. What a treat!

Candy canes were also made in the kitchen. A special confectioners hook on one of the posts allowed the candy that had been cooked to the brittle stage to be pulled like taffy into pencil-sized ribbons, red stripes added, and each cane individually formed, again on the marble slabs.

Crushed peanuts were an ingredient of yet another specialty - nut mountains. After an ice-cream machine was installed, these goodies were offered. Each mountain was formed by filling paper cups with ice cream in its soft stage and setting a wooden sucker stick in the center. After the ice cream hardened, the cup was removed and the ice cream form was dipped in melted chocolate. Then the final twirl was in the nuts. Can you believe this fantasy cost only a nickel and was available in almost all of the 27 varieties of ice cream for sale?

Holidays throughout the year were especially delightful at the Candy and Nut Hut. In February were the National President's days with patriotic red, white, and blue candies for teas and parties. Then there was Valentine's Day! School parties called for chocolate cream hearts, marshmallow-filled hearts, and motto hearts in several sizes with clever sayings printed on the sugar hearts.

Heart boxes were filled with a tempting assortment of candies, but more important were the boxes themselves. From half-pound red paper-covered hearts to 5 or 10 pound elegant satin hearts, each was designed to help the recipient look more fondly on the giver. The clerks and especially Irene Burr delighted in hiding trinkets in a heart chosen by a young man for his sweetheart. Trinkets? Everything from gold bracelets, a heart-shaped necklace, to a diamond engagement ring.

March brought St. Patrick's Day with its usual green and white mints and shamrock-shaped candies to complement the mixed nuts on the tea table. Then there came Easter.

Preparations for Easter started weeks before the actual day, both in the store and in the anticipation of children who hoped the Easter bunny would hop down the trail from the Nut Hut to their house with a filled basket. Each basket was individually packed FULL with goodies. Thousands of baskets from 25 cents to five dollars were ready. The windows of the store and the tops of the counters were lined with Easter baskets, covered with plain or colored cellophane and tied with a jaunty bow. And as always, special baskets were packed for special orders.

Parents could choose to fill their own baskets also. Chocolate rabbits from penny size to three-pound solid ones, stuffed rabbits, fluffy chicks, imported chocolate figures covered with colored foil! Candy jelly eggs ranged in size from humming-bird, canary, and regular size with a goodly proportion of black jellies in the popular licorice flavor. Duck and goose eggs were filled with marshmallow. Fruit and nut cream filled eggs were nickel-sized to five-pound elegancies and could have individual names written on with frosting. Many school teachers brought lists of their students' first names so each knew he was special. (Schools and churches always received a nice discount.)

May brought Mother's Day, a favorite of all the Burr family. Three-pound boxes of assorted creams and bonbons were enjoyed by many of the mothers in Rockford. Again, the assortment available was intriguing.



Lee H. Burr

The candy and nut hut opened in 1929
and the Burr family sold it in 1949.
The family lived at 2705 High
Crest Road

Many of these boxes included a silk carnation and a satin bow nestling under the cellophane covering.

Air-conditioning for buildings was not yet available, but during summer months, the Nut Hut boasted 3 powerful fans on 6-foot standards that kept the air moving. It was pleasantly cool when one entered the store. And it was even more pleasant to indulge in a double-dipped ice cream cone. All flavors were for sale, either in pint packages or nut mountains or the cones. That is, all except bubble-gum. Sherbets and ices were made from scratch - cranberry, pineapple, green-gage plums.

October brought caramel apples and trick-or-treat candies. November was when people started making their holiday fruit cakes. Candied orange peel, lemon peel, citron, three colors of pineapple (red, green and natural yellow), red and green cherries were the standard varieties. These were lined in rows in the glass showcases and were also cut into tiny bits and mixed so they could be purchased in the right amount for each person's family recipe. This showcase was also where you might find such exotic sweets as Angelique (candied rhubarb imported from France), Ginger from the Orient (this was delicious in



Irene Cleveland Burr
Mrs. Lee H. Burr was regent of Rock-
ford Chapter Daughters of the American
Revolution 1929-1931.

tea and in dishes made from eastern recipes), pears and apricots (native American sweets good for nibbling anytime).

Stuffed dates were a famous Nut Hut offering. Four or five pitted dates were softened by heating slightly, molded together, a whole almond or pecan or English walnut pressed into the top, and the entire date rolled in sugar. A pound of these fit nicely into one of the Nut Hut boxes and made a tasty gift. The boxes were orange colored, with a sketch of the log cabin designed on the cover in green. They were wrapped in the mottled green and white paper which was in huge rolls at the counters and tied with orange ribbon. The dates were imported from Asia and were shipped in wooden crates that had to be pried apart with a claw hammer. They were rich and flavorful.

This might be the place to tell of the blocks of milk chocolate that were used in the candy making, and were also broken into chunks for the home kitchen. Many of those chunks were just plain eaten. Dark rich bittersweet chocolate and also semi-sweet were available.

In the early fall nuts in the shell were sold from barrels and bushel baskets arranged in the center of the store space. Almonds, pecans, black walnuts, filberts or hazel nuts, Brazils, English walnuts, were available separately or in several different mixtures. The popcorn was usually still on the cob, and when each local producer

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Mrs. Lucretia Burr Charles
She has held many chairmanships in
Rockford Chapter NSDAR; currently
chairman for American Indians.



Henrietta "Rita" Burr
Wright
Henrietta operated a nut
and candy hut in Beloit.

brought some in to sell to Lee Burr, there were certain specifications the farmer had to meet. First of all, Mr. Burr insisted on taking a sample home and testing it for popping and taste himself. The kernels also had to rub against each other and come off the cob easily.

Christmas was the best time of the year at the Candy and Nut Hut. The day after Thanksgiving the windows were dressed in their holiday splendor. There were four plate glass windows with sliding doors opened from the store. Each section displayed a dream of sweets and nuts. Satin or taffeta or perhaps brown burlap covered the floor of the windows. Stacked boxes of candy and nuts, trays of cellophane covered seasonal candies, caramel covered apples and nuts in shells vied for attention of the passerby - who seldom did pass by. Signs of further sale specials invited one inside. Signs were also found on each tray of candy in the showcases, on each jar, on each pile of boxes. The signs were in the shape of a log cabin, carefully cut from pale green poster board with the name and price of each article in large enough letters and figures so they could be easily read.

To be sure that the sun did not melt the candies or hurt the other displays, heavy brown canvas curtains were fastened on each window when the store was closed at night. A green and white striped awning was rolled down by hand to protect the displays from the sun's rays. But back to Christmas! There were boxes of salted nuts, of stuffed dates, of three-pound boxes of candy to be wrapped and mailed out of town. There were many more boxes to please those who lived in Rockford. All chocolate creams, chocolates with bonbons and caramels, chocolate-covered nuts were found in every size from one-half pound to five pound boxes. Customers came in with lists to be filled and lined

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Frances Burr Brauer with granddaughter Paula Mahlburg
All members of the Burr family worked in the
Burr Candy and Nut Hut.

up 3-deep in front of the counters. If the customer was not sure whether a certain kind of candy or salted nut was just what he wanted, he was offered a sample by the clerk who was waiting on him. Seldom did he decline to taste - more seldom did he not enjoy the sample.

Then there were the stocking stuffers. Santa Claus was available in solid chocolate molds, in marshmallow, in creams and in imported chocolate forms covered with brightly tinted foil. Edible toys of chocolate, tiny cream mice in pink, white, and chocolate. Hard candy in every possible color and shape, many with centers of delectable flavors. Candy canes in all sizes and flavors charmed the children.

During December the doorbell was frequently heard in the front part of the store. This meant that a delivery was at the back door, a half-block from the sales section. Trucks brought cartons of candy and nuts to replenish the stock for sale. The bell could also mean that one of the Burr daughters, Mrs. Rita Wright, was ready to load more supplies for sale in her Nut Hut in Beloit, Wisconsin. At one time or another, every member of Lee and Irene Burr's family was employed at the Candy and Nut Hut, according to Mrs. Russell G. Charles (Lucetta Burr Charles). Each one has special memories of his or her own.

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