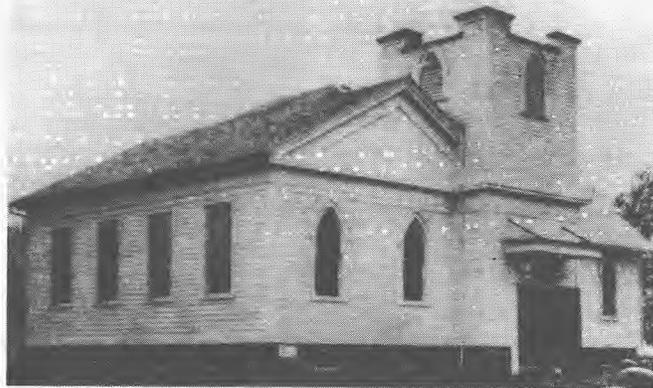
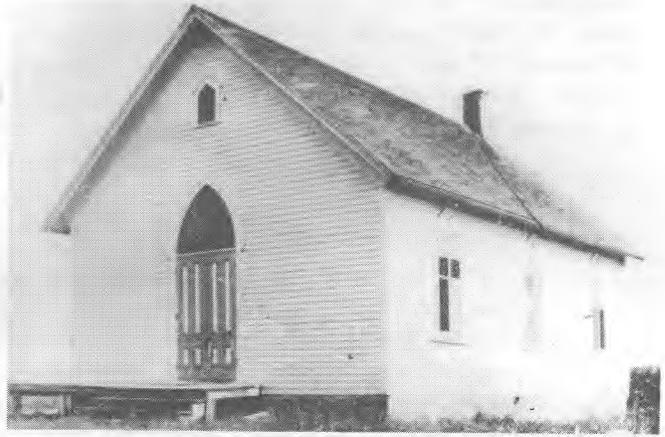




NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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BURRITT TOWNSHIP, WINNEBAGO COUNTY A CELEBRATION OF HISTORY



A TALE OF TWO CHURCHES

Upper left, the 1855 Baptist church. Upper right, the 1878 Methodist Church.

Center, the Burritt Community Church. In 1937 the congregations merged both membership and structures. A tower connects the two church buildings.

Photos courtesy *Rockford Register Star*, and Jack and Sue Crandall

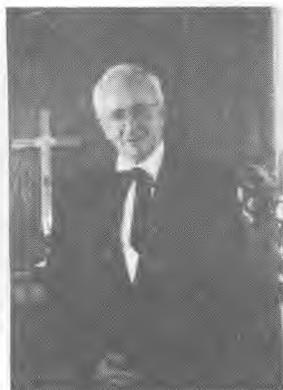
FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK

In this issue, we recognize the history and people of Burrirt Township, Winnebago County. Named after the Burrirt family of neighboring Owen Township, the area attracted farmers from Scotland, England and Ireland beginning in the early 1840s. Today, Illinois Route 70 (known locally as Trask Bridge Road) bisects the township at a diagonal. The church, the Grange Hall (now the Township Hall), and schools served to connect the residents.

When I asked Sue Crandall how I could help with the June Burrirt celebration sponsored by the Rockford Historical Society, she said, "Take notes and write about it for the next issue of *Nuggets*." With the help of Jack and Sue Crandall, Clarence Wemple, Don Milne, cemetery interpreters and additional information from *Pioneer Families of Burrirt* compiled by Faye and Dolores Hilton, this issue developed. It represents a partial history of stalwart pioneers and their descendants.

Peggy Jensen

Peggy Jensen, Editor



Interpreters Don Milne and Jack Crandall related Trask Bridge Picnic and Burrirt Community Church histories.



Clarence Wemple Jr., great-great grandson of Jacob Van Alstine Wemple, represented Wempletown.

A CELEBRATION OF BURRITT TOWNSHIP HISTORY

"Not to know what happened before one was born is to remain a child." Cicero: *De Oratore XXXIV*.

Quoted by Bergen Evans, *Dictionary of Quotations*, p.316.

June 1, 1997, marked a day set aside to celebrate history surrounding Wempletown, IL. The Rockford Historical Society sponsored the event, chaired by Jack and Sue Crandall. Interpreters spoke at Burritt Township Hall, Burritt Community Church and North Burritt Cemetery. About 800 persons attended.

A 10:40 morning worship service at the **Burritt Community Church** set the tone for the day. Pastor Kathy Aram and the Crandalls, dressed in period costumes, arrived in a horse-drawn wagon. During worship, men sat on the left side and women on the right. Pastor Kathy preached a testimony to early Methodism.

The church structure presents a unique history. In 1855 a Baptist congregation had built a modest church on Trask Bridge Road land donated by Jacob Van Alstine Wemple. The Methodists had worshipped on Cemetery Road since 1878.

In 1937 a merger was considered. To accommodate the new entity, a different house of worship would be needed. The members decided not to destroy two existing structures--each valued at \$2000--but rather to combine them. The Methodist church was moved across the fields to an expanded site on

Trask Bridge Road. A tower connected the two buildings. Cost: \$4500. Renamed Burritt Community Church, it remains a center of worship today.

During the afternoon, long-time members Jack Crandall and Eunice Pagel presented personal recollections of congregational activities.

At the Burritt Township Hall, Don Milne presented the story of the **Trask Bridge Picnic**. Billed as "The World's Largest Farm Picnic," the free event attracted as many as 50,000 persons. Originated in 1911 by Walter Potter, Walter Livingston and Elmer Scott, the first picnic took place at the Scott's home. Thereafter on the fourth Wednesday in August, nearby Andrew's Grove was the site.

Besides machinery and exhibit displays (the latter received prizes), the affair featured two platforms with entertainment by choruses, bands, orchestras, WLS stars and personalities such as George Goebel and Rollie Sponberg. Horse polo games, plowing matches, auto and style shows, drill teams, hog-calling contests, ball games, politics and visiting filled the day. Each family brought their own picnic lunch.

Gas rationing during World War II and highway construction

interrupted a 50-year schedule until the last hurrah in 1965.

Trask Bridge Road (also designated as Illinois Route 70) received its name from brothers Elias and Alva Trask. They had staked a claim where near where the "Lead Mine Trail" crossed the Pecatonica River. At that time, the only way to cross the river was to swim or to ford. The Trask brothers applied for a license to operate a ferry in 1837.

Later, circa 1839, a wooden bridge would be built. An 1868 iron bridge served until 1931-32. Then engineers rerouted the river and dug a channel under a new concrete bridge being constructed in a corn field.

Where In the World Is Wempletown?

In 1982 when Clarence Wemple Jr. and his wife Peggy drove from Naperville in search of Wempletown, they found Burritt Community Church and a Grange Hall on Trask Bridge Road (Illinois Route 70) about six miles northwest of Riverside Blvd.

Seeing a man working in his yard next to the church, Clarence introduced himself to Marvin Lightfoot. "I'm Clarence Wemple, great-great-grandson of Jacob Van Alstyne Wemple."

Lightfoot exclaimed, "We've never seen any Wemples around here before." He called his wife to meet the Wemples and then took them on a tour of the church.

In 1855, Clarence's great-great-grandfather had moved his family--wife Eleanor and 11 children--from Chicago where for seven years he had owned and operated the Chicago Threshing Machine Manufactory on Randolph Street. Bankruptcy forced him to find a new life.

He settled in Burritt Township, bought properties, and set up wagon and blacksmith shops and a general store with spacious living quarters. In 1859, he gave a warranty deed to William Beauchamp for the wagon shop and to Alfred Tessier for the blacksmith shop. Woodmen of America met on the upper floor of the blacksmith shop; townspeople danced there on Saturday evenings. Next, a stagecoach inn served travelers.

Thus the Wempletown community developed. Deeds in Clarence's possession show sales of land to other settlers by Jacob. In 1855 he donated property to the Baptists on which to erect a church. Members provided labor, lumber, and other materials. Eventually, Jacob and Eleanor left Wempletown for Quincy, Michigan where he died in 1873.

The era of Wemples in Burritt Township ended as sons, grandsons and their children found employment in the Chicago area. Clarence Jr. was born in Chicago, worked there as a freight clerk, a Sun Oil gas station operator, and a school custodian. Now retired, he and Peggy live in the Roscoe area and occasionally visit the Burritt Community Church.

Cemetery Interpreters

Costumed interpreters, many of them descendants of pioneer Burritt families, recited brief life histories of persons now buried in the North Burritt Cemetery on Cemetery Road. The following paragraphs represent edited versions of presentations plus supplementary facts as acknowledged in credits.

JOHN WILCOX, 1825-1915

Rev. John Wilcox, was born in 1825 in Cornwall, England. He taught school, worked in the post office, and participated in the Lyceum Circuit until emigrating with his family to Quebec in 1850. Soon thereafter they arrived in Burritt Township, Winnebago County and purchased 100 acres of farm land on Trask Bridge Road one-half mile west of Wempletown Corners.

As a Congregational minister, he preached in the Pecatonica area. In 1855 he married Margaret Webber, daughter of a wealthy family who owned 600 acres near Rockton. Their family consisted of seven children: John, William, Mary, Herbert, George, Clarence and Lillian. Margaret died in 1912 following a short illness.

Then, with failing eyesight, he procured a reader so that his life-long interest in books could continue. In 1915, following a fall in his home, he developed pneumonia and died later that year.

Source: Ernest W. Cummings

BROWN C. ATKINSON, 1841-1919

Brown C. Atkinson's father John emigrated from Cumberland, England with his parents--James and Jane Foster Atkinson--and five siblings in 1832. After seven weeks at sea, they arrived in Quebec. Fifteen months later, the Atkinson family relocated first in New York State and later in Illinois.

John Atkinson spent the winter of 1836 in La Salle. In the spring of 1837, having made claim to government land in Harrison Township, Winnebago County, he built a log house. Meanwhile, he had married Nancy L. Conklin, a native of Wayne County, Pennsylvania, daughter of Benjamin and Mercy Conklin. They lived in Harrison Township for seven years. Young Brown was born September 30, 1841 there. Three years later, the Atkinsons moved to Burritt Township.

Lack of railroads made transporting grain to markets in Chicago, Milwaukee, Racine, the mining towns of southwestern Wisconsin, and to Savanna, Illinois, a tedious task. On one occasion, Brown's father received a request from a Beloit miller to deliver a load of flour to Mineral Point. John left on a Monday morning with his wagon load, but upon reaching his destination could not locate the man who had placed the order. He tried to find other buyers, but did not meet with success until he reached Savannah on Saturday. His delivery misadventure reaped a profit of fifty cents!

Later, when the railroad had reached Elgin, Burritt Township

farmers teamed their grain and produce there. Brown accompanied his father on a trip to deliver pork. Poor road conditions forced them to unload in mud. As a result, they received only \$2 per hundred instead of the contract price of \$2.50.

Two memorable events occurred in 1862. Brown married Mary E. Henry, daughter of Clara Adella Berry and John Y. Henry then living in Owen Township, but originally from Bradford, Pennsylvania. Brown enlisted in Company A, 74th Illinois Infantry in August of that year. He served until Feb. 7, 1863. His father-in-law had enlisted in the same unit during the same month, but he died at Nashville, Tennessee, Dec. 17, 1862.

Brown and Mary Henry had eleven children: Estella, David H, George, Frank, Clara, Albert, Edith, Chester, Foster, Ethel and Evelyn.

Sources: *Portrait and Biographical Record, of Winnebago and Boone County, History 1892; Pioneer Families of Burrirt.* Research by Melissa Norup.

REBECCA HILTON, 1787 - 1859

Widow Rebecca Hilton emigrated to Rhode Island in 1850 with sons Robert and Ellis and daughters Rebecca and Mary. Earlier in 1843, her son Francis and his wife Milcah Hartley had settled in the Burrirt area. Enamored with the area, Francis first persuaded his brother-in-law and sister William and Hannah Andrews to emigrate also. The two farmsteads existed back to back: Francis' on Trask Bridge Road and William's on Cemetery Road.

After two years in Rhode Island, during which time daughter Rebecca had married James Higgenbottom, the rest of the Hiltons arrived in the Burrirt area. Robert and his wife Harriett Barningham and three children settled on Telegraph Road near Winnebago Road. Ellis and his wife Jane Hamer chose to live in the southwest corner of Burrirt Township. Another son Edwin and his wife Deborah broke the family tradition by settling in Missouri.

Hilton family members buried here include not only mother Rebecca who died in 1859, but some of Robert's family, Rebecca and James, as well as children of Rebecca and Francis who died of diphtheria.

One of Rebecca's great-great-great-grand-daughters still lives nearby on Eddie Road.

Source: Faye H. Hilton.

ROBERT C. OLIVER, 1839-1922

Captain Robert C. Oliver, Civil War veteran died at age 83, February 7, 1922. His parents, originally from County Down, Ireland, where Robert was born, had arrived in Harrison Township in 1860 after 12 years near Rochester, New York.

Robert enlisted in Company C, 55th Illinois Infantry, Sept. 9, 1860. His unit was assigned to First Brigade, Second Division, Fifteenth Army Corps, Army of the Tennessee. He participated in 32 battles, including Shiloh, Vicksburg, Jackson, Atlanta, The March to the Sea and Charleston.

He was present at the surrender of General Johnston. His regiment of 987 officers and men returned from war with only 239. They had marched 3340 miles, travelled by rail 2875 miles and by water 5850 miles.

After his 1865 discharge, Robert returned to Harrison Township to farm. He married Jane Atkinson, March 26, 1866. They had three children: Robert C., Guy T., and Irma.

He served as Harrison Township supervisor, Highway Commissioner of Rockford Township, and Winnebago County Sheriff 1894-98. Research by Richard McCray

EDWARD HENRY BOOMER, 1848-1922

Edward Henry Boomer, born March 7, 1848 in Newark, New Jersey moved to Burrirt Community with his parents John and Margaret Johnstone Boomer when he was nine years old. In 1863, he joined a crew of wagon drivers and headed South, but then enlisted in the 13th Wisconsin Infantry. Stationed in Stephenson, Alabama, 40 miles from Union base operations, his Company G was sent to guard a ford at Paint Rock Alabama. Taken prisoner he spent time at Castle Morgan in Cababa, Alabama. After release he went to Jackson, Mississippi, marched to Vicksburg and while there heard news of Lincoln's assassination. He spent weeks in a field hospital with a malignant fever. Discharged in Madison, Wisconsin, summer of 1865.

He married Celinda Weatherhead, daughter of James

and Nancy Fisher Weatherhead, Sept. 28, 1870. Their children included Willis James, Ella May, twins Ida Maude and Iva Mame, Jay Edward, Edna L., Stanley Weatherhead, Gertrude, Hazel Irene, and Glen E. Some are buried in the Burrirt Cemetery; others in Durand, Greenwood and Bethel cemeteries as well as in Nebraska and South Dakota.

Research by Laura Koch

ELLIS ANDREW--1838-1909

Ellis Andrew's grove of oak trees in Burrirt Township furnished the site for the annual Trask Bridge Picnic. Born in Lancashire County England, November 21, 1838, he emigrated with his parents William and Hannah Andrew to Rhode Island in 1846. William left his family there, traveled to Illinois, purchased 30 acres in Burrirt Township and then returned for his family. An industrious man, he eventually increased his holdings to 260 acres.

Meanwhile Ellis, at age eight, began earning his own living, an experience that limited his educational opportunities. One of 13 children born to his parents, he lived at home until he married Ellen Rudd at age 28. The daughter of Joel and Caroline Estee Rudd, Ellen lived on the 60-acre farm in Burrirt Township owned by her father. He died in 1856; Caroline, in 1874. At that time Ellis and Ellen, who had been farming land on shares, 1866-1874, purchased the Rudd property. They added to it until they had acquired 175 acres. Besides farming pursuits, Ellis served as constable for four years and as Road Master

two years.

Ellis and Ellen's son Lewis, born January 2, 1869, practiced dentistry in the Rockford Trust Building after graduating from Chicago Dental College in 1899. A bachelor, he enjoyed traveling, photography, music and gardening. His large Glenwood Avenue garden was located across the street from the present Summerdale School.

A second son, Charles, born October 3, 1870, married Bertha Adella Davis of Burrirt. They had one child, Verna, born May 22, 1902. A farmer, like his father and grandfather, Charles added to his acreage by purchasing most of his father's holdings when Ellis retired in 1899. Charles farmed that land until his death in 1955.

Upon retirement, Ellis and Ellen moved to Rockford. They rented a home for four years until they built a house at 837 Horsman Street. He died May 21, 1909. Ellen, Feb. 15, 1923

Source: Sharon Taylor

CHAPMAN--CRANDALL

A close knit community, most Burrirt Township residents could claim relationship to one another either through blood lines or marriage. Consider, for instance, the Chapman-Crandall family. Moses Chapman, who at 17 years of age emigrated in 1830 with his family from Lancashire, England married Mary Andrew, a grand-daughter of Rebecca Hilton. After Mary's early death, Moses married Mary's sister Alice. Their daughter Clara married Ed Scott; daughter

Ada married Rob Oliver; son George married Laura Bate, related to the Franklins and the Knapps. George and Laura's daughter Ruth, married Harold Crandall from neighboring Harrison Township. Harold's mother Leta was an Atkinson with ties to Burrirt Township Conklin and Knapp families. Harold had two brothers, Dwight and Leland. Harold and Ruth had four children: Kenneth, Jack, Donna and Barbara. Two Crandall cousins, Kenneth and Bob, married Hildebrand daughters. Donna Crandall married Ed Conklin; Barbara married Dick Drogemuller.

Area Crandalls today also trace their heritage beyond Burrirt Township. They claim ninth and tenth generation ties to Elder John Crandall, a founder of the state of Rhode Island.

Kenneth, the oldest of Harold and Ruth Crandall's children served as a Methodist minister in Chicago suburbs for 40 years. Now retired, he lives on the site of the homestead farm first owned by Moses and Alice Chapman. Jack's full name, John Chapman Crandall, suggests a relationship to "Johnny Appleseed," whose given name was John Chapman. Jack serves as an interpreter of the Burrirt Church. Donna died in her early 30s. Barbara and Dick Drogemuller also live on a portion of the family farm. Mike Crandall, son of Jack and Suzanne, purchased a lot on the farm and lives on Eddie Road.

Source: Kenneth Crandall

Other presenters related family histories of Gale, Milne, Knapp and Lightfoot families.

Cornell Gale (1882 -1961) came to Winnebago County from Plano, Illinois, at the turn of the century, married Sarah Dickinson in 1908, and farmed on Meridian Road.

Corneilius Gale married Eleanor Smith Feb.3, 1893. They lived in the stone house that had previously served as the Burritt post office. He worked as an insurance agent for Country Companies. Merrill W. Gale, married to Elizabeth Ann Cox, lived in the Burritt area with their two children Howard Latham and Carrie Janette (Coots.) By marriage, the Gale family is related to the Coots, Lightfoot, Reed, Hurd and Bachman families.

Source: *Pioneer Families of Burritt, Cemetery Inscriptions and History, Burritt Township, Winnebago County, Il.* compiled by Fay and Dolores Hilton, 1983.

Ashley Knapp, born in Eldred, McKean County, Pennsylvania, 1821, arrived in Burritt Township in the early 1840s. To build his first home, he hauled lumber from Chicago. On a 200-acre farm, he discovered springs of pure water flowing from 150 - 200 barrels per hour. He built a dam, formed a pond, stocked it with speckled-back trout and named it The Fish Hatchery. He married Elizabeth Williams in 1844. Their children included Loretta Bate, Aurella Franklin, Warren, Lucretia Bates and Lovina.

William Knapp, also born in McKean County, came to Burritt in 1854. He married Burritt Township native Martha Scott in 1864.

Sources: *Portrait and Biographical Record, of Winnebago and Boone County, History, 1892* and *History of Winnebago County 1877* quoted in *Pioneer Families of Burritt*, Fay and Dolores Hilton, 1983.

Richard Lightfoot assisted his grandfather on a County Cornwall farm in England until he reached 24 years of age. Then he sailed for the United States in 1851 via Quebec enroute to Illinois. He married the widow Susannah Swindall in 1859, mother of three children. The Lightfoots established a livestock business in Burritt Township known as Maple Grove Farm. They specialized in hogs and Angus cows. Grandson Marvin Lightfoot, son of Albert, still lives in Burritt, next door to the church.

Sources: *Marvin Lightfoot on video. Portrait and Biographical Record, History of Winnebago and Boone Co., 1892* quoted in *Pioneer Families of Burritt, Fay and Dolores Hilton, 1983.*

The first **Milnes** arrived here in 1840 from Scotland. They lived temporarily in a three-sided sod shanty. Early on, to market wheat harvested on his 160-acre farm, William Milne walked about seven miles per day behind a team of oxen to Chicago and back. He'd return 30 days later with supplies such as sugar, flour and calico.

In 1850 William married Fanny Radford, a former lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria.

William received naturalization papers in 1860 when "war was in the wind." But at age 41 in 1861, he was considered too old to enlist.

A son Frederick married Emily Dickinson January 1, 1880. They had one son Wendell. Frederick died in 1892 eight days before his father's death. Emily taught school, served as Burritt Township treasurer for more than 28 years and managed the family's 80-acre farm with the help of Wendell.

The Milne tradition continues today as Don Milne (a former Winnebago County sheriff) and his wife Carol reside on land homesteaded by his forebears.

Sources: Dennis Milne on video. Don Milne interview. *Past and Present of Winnebago County, 1905* quoted in *Pioneer Families of Burritt, Fay and Dolores Hilton, 1983.*

Robert Hamer, 1843-1863
son of Andrew and Ann Dennis Hamer, enlisted Sept. 9, 1861, in the 55th I.V.I. He died May 29, 1863, during his regiment's attack at Vicksburg.



Left: Richard McCray presented Captain Robert C. Oliver's life story. Right: Tony Grotto related Andrew Hamer's Civil War experiences.



"The Heritage Strings," members of the Burritt Community Church, provided music at the cemetery as well as for the morning worship service.



Upper left: Ernest Cummings, representing the Rev. John Wilcox, pauses between presentations. Upper right: The Rev. Kenneth Crandall explains the Chapman/Crandall family connections. Center: Melissa Norup relates facts about the Brown C. Atkinson family.

Lower left: Marvin Lightfoot stands beside an exhibit of Lightfoot tools and photos. Lower right: Dennis Milne wears the beaver hat worn by William Milne, circa 1840.

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