
NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 36 March 1998 NUMBER 1

PRESIDENTIAL INTEGRITY

REMEMBERING THREE LOCAL CORPORATE PRESIDENTS



**ALLAN MALLQUIST, PAST POTENTATE OF TEBALA SHRINE TEMPLE,
ROCKFORD, TRAVELED TO LOS ANGELES IN THE 1970S TO PRESENT AN
HONORARY MEMBERSHIP PLAQUE TO JOHN "DUKE" WAYNE**

PHOTO BY BOB PLUNKETT, R.S.; COURTESY, KENT MALLQUIST.

FROM AN EDITOR'S DESK

We've dedicated this issue to honoring three business and community leaders notable not only for business acumen, but also for integrity. Allan Mallquist, founder of Mallquist Butter & Egg Company, gained a reputation nationwide for philanthropic fund-raising. Clinton Maslen, president of Colonial Baking Company, reached out to assist in development of private entrepreneurship and outreach facilities. Ward Lidbetter continued a management style instigated by founders of Rockford Screw Products Corporation.

Peggy Jensen, Editor

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY CALENDAR

Sunday, March 1. Annual Spring Dinner

Where: Midway Village History Building

Price: \$12 per person; choice of prime rib or chicken cordon bleu

Send check, payable to Rockford Historical Society, with entree choice, by Feb. 20 to: Rockford Historical Society,

6799 Guilford Road, Rockford IL 61107

Program: Dr. William Shields, President Rockford College

Music by Heritage Strings.

Information: 397-9112

Saturday, June 27. Annual bus tour. Save the date!

Fee: Members, \$22; Non-members, \$23.

Destinations: Heritage Canyon, Fulton (on the Mississippi River), and historic Mount Carroll--both located in northwest Illinois.

Heritage Canyon, a reclaimed stone quarry has been transformed into an 1800s village. Pathways and bridges lead visitors to a log cabin settlement, a church, a school, a farm home, a doctor's office, a general store and more. Waterfalls, a water wheel, a fish pond and fountains enhance the old mill area. Trees tower above; flowers bloom profusely.

At noon, between stops, we've scheduled a buffet-style lunch at Buck's Barn, Thompson. Here you'll also view a classic car collection and miniature horses.

In Mount Carroll, first we'll visit Oakville Settlement and then a step-on guide will escort our bus through the city's historic district. Most of the town has been registered as a National Historic District.

Other details later in a postcard mailing.

PRESIDENTIAL INTEGRITY

ALLAN MALLQUIST, MALLQUIST BUTTER & EGG COMPANY

CLINTON MASLEN, COLONIAL BAKING COMPANY

WARD LIDBETTER, ROCKFORD (SCREW) PRODUCTS CORPORATION



ALLAN MALLQUIST, 1987-1997

When Allan Mallquist died November 12, 1997, Rockford lost one of its outstanding philanthropists. He not only made substantial contributions to favored charitable organizations, but he encouraged others to make similar commitments. Reportedly, during three decades--the 60s, 70s and 80s--he had raised at least \$80 million for local and national charities.

MALLQUIST'S "KEY"

In a December 1990 interview with *Rockford Register Star's* Julie Snively, he explained that raising large sums for charitable purposes is not a hurry-up procedure.

Rather, it was "believing in the cause and being able to explain the good that would be accomplished." Allan's son Kent recalls that before approaching others, his Dad always made his own commitment.

SUCCESS STORIES

At a National Shrine Convention, for instance, Allan befriended an elderly Shriner sitting alone in the hotel lobby. In conversation they exchanged shared experiences. Then, says Kent, "Dad maintained contact with birthday and Christmas cards, and letters." The ultimate gift,

estimates Kent, ran into millions of dollars in support of the Crippled Children and Burn Hospitals.

Self-made millionaire Ralph H. Ekvall--a former Rockford resident who had relocated in 1952 to Florida--responded to Mallquist appeals. Each year after a personal visit at the Ekvall home, Mallquist would receive checks for Rockford charities. But in 1958 when Mallquist accepted membership on the Endowment, Wills and Gifts Committee of Shriner's Hospitals in North America, he sought gifts to those venues.

Subsequently, Ekvall set up a trust to benefit both Rockford Memorial Hospital and Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children. Valid only after both he and his wife had died, the trust in 1990 designated \$1 million to our local hospital and \$2 to the Shriner's.

BUSINESS VENTURES

Allan Mallquist emigrated to Chicago in 1929, at age 19, from his native Sweden. For two years, he sold eggs door to door in fashionable Gold Coast areas. Then in Rockford, he purchased a Ford truck for \$35. That enabled him to establish Mallquist Butter & Egg Company. The business thrived. Eventually, sales rose from 100 cartons weekly to 300,000.

Not content with only one venture, Mallquist delved in real estate with partner Francis S. Keye after World War II in the Keye-Mal Corporation. In the early 1950s, he co-founded Rockford's first post-World War II radio station, WRRR, with Aleard Veline DDS, and Attorney Guy Reno.

BEYOND BUSINESS

Above and beyond business, Mallquist affiliated with the Masonic fraternity in the late 1930s. He served as

Illustrious Potentate of Tebala Shrine in 1956, and received the 33rd and last degree of Scottish Rite in 1961. After a stint on the Board of Trustees of the Oak Park, Illinois, Unit of Shriners Hospitals for Crippled Children he advanced to the national level on the Endowment, Wills and Gifts Committee. In 1982, he was designated secretary emeritus.

HONORS

Among honors accorded to Allan Mallquist, we mention "Order of North Star, First Class," by King Carl Gustaf of Sweden; "Service Above Self Award" by Rockford Rotary Club, 1977; co-honoree with son Kent, "Fund Raising Volunteer of the Year" by National Society of Fund-Raising Executives, 1989.

As a member of the Swedish Historical Society, he co-founded the Rockford Museum Center. He served on an

advisory board for the Salvation Army and as a trustee at Swedish American Hospital. Forest Hills Country Club friends recall his gin rummy expertise.

MEMORIAL SERVICE

On Saturday, November 29, 1997, the Rev. Dr. Denver Bittner conducted a memorial service at Zion Lutheran Church following Mallquist's November 12 death. He is survived here by his wife Verna (his first wife Harriet died in 1967), son Kent, daughter-in-law Marti, two grandchildren and three step-grandchildren; and in Sweden by his brother Tage Mellqvist, sister Elsa Jansson and several nieces and nephews.

Sources: Mallquist, Kent, "Remembrances of My Father," Memorial Service program, (Nov.29, 1997). Obituary notice, *Rockford Register Star*, (Nov.23, 1997). Snively, Julie, "Swedish immigrant has fund-raising flair," *Rockford Register Star*, (Dec.20, 1990) 1-2A.

CLINTON MASLEN

1907-1996

In 1935 "Clint" Maslen began his Rockford career at Colonial Baking Company working for then-president and owner Louis Caster. Maslen rose to vice-president under Caster and then succeeded him as president.

The two developed a father-son relationship fostered in part by the death of Caster's son Rex. Upon Caster's death in 1960, Maslen inherited not only the bakery but also WREX-TV (named in honor of Rex) and KOCO-TV, Oklahoma City. Later, Caster's widow named Maslen and his wife Loretta as principal beneficiaries of her estate.

SURROGATE FAMILIES

In parallel situations, since the Maslens had no children, they too "adopted" loyal friends as family. Among them, nurse Sharon Bunting Cassaro. She had

cared for Loretta, who suffered from a debilitating nerve disorder, for 16 years before her 1986 death.

Cassaro remained to manage the home and later to care for Clint after he suffered a series of strokes. In a *Register Star* interview with Jen Bland, Cassaro said, "He was the most loving, generous, compassionate person I've ever, ever met."

Maslen's association with the Don Gasparini family also fostered ties beyond mere friendship. "My family's been Clint's family," says ex-Sheriff Gasparini. The two first met when a teen-age Gasparini received instructions from then-vice-president Maslen on how to properly display Colonial breads in supermarket displays. Later, relations cemented through common associations in Tebala Shrine Temple and its Royal Order of Jesters.

In 1990, Gasparini built a

home next door to Maslen's Pecatonica farm. That enabled him to visit daily with his "father" friend.

MASLEN GENEROSITY

Gasparini recalls how Maslen offered financial assistance to struggling entrepreneurs such as a minority group establishing a southwest supermarket. He also assisted organizations in need.

In another instance, Maslen donated funds to The Phantom Regiment. His gift provided buses for travel to competitions.

Further, Maslen philanthropy extended to fostering development of Growth Enterprises, Inc., the Center for Sight and Hearing Impaired, Northwest Community Center, and The Mill.

HONORS

The Junior Achievement Business Hall of Fame inducted Maslen in 1994. That same year he received

the J. C. Penney Golden Rule Award. The local Rotary Club honored him with their "Service Above Self Award."

CIVIC AFFILIATIONS

He was a loyal member of the Winnebago County Republican Party as well as the Morning and Noon Lions Clubs. His suggestion to implement an outing day for school crossing guards gained support from the Lions Club.

As a member of the Chamber of Commerce, he helped to form the first "Council to Support Law Enforcement" in Illinois.

A WIFE-PLEASING VENTURE

Loretta's love for cats led to still another avenue of service. Maslen built a 12x18-foot house complete with bunks, heat and air-conditioning to care for abandoned cats.

CAT HOUSE FOUNDATION

Later, Maslen established a Cat House Foundation, complete with a Board of

Directors, to perpetuate care for cats. Now Gasparini's wife Peggie oversees foundation activities.

The cats--up to 200--are housed in a newer 30x50-foot building on Gasparini property. Not necessarily confined, they may freely roam the property.

Each one receives a name and is identified by an ear chip. Vets make regular visits to spay, to neuter, and to give shots. Anyone wishing to offer a home to one of these cats, may choose from among "Heinz 57" varieties, says Gasparini. He adds, "We give them away free.

BAKERY DEVELOPMENTS

Changes took place at Colonial--located on Green Street--after Maslen retired. The firm acquired the entire block bounded by Green, Cedar, Winnebago and Rockton streets. Rainbo plants in Aurora and Joliet

closed. The firm name changed to Holsum Baking Company and is now owned by Madison-based Metz Baking Company. Still specializing in bread and buns, they market to fast food franchises, supply private label products to local supermarkets and operate retail stores.

Richard Slettern succeeded Maslen as president, serving from 1970 -1993. Now Kurt Slettern, Richard's son, manages both Holsum in Rockford and Gardner in Madison under the Metz umbrella.

REMEMBERING MASLEN

Maslen's friends remember his unstinting generosity. To explain that attitude, Gasparini quotes an oft-repeated Maslen statement: "Everybody's a friend until proven different."

Sources: Bland, Jen, "Gasparini recalls paternal bond with mentor Maslen," *Rockford Register Star*, Aug. 3, 1996. Interviews with Don Gasparini, Richard Slettern.

WARD LIDBETTER
1915-1997

Ward Lidbetter succeeded Swan Hillman in 1965 as president of Rockford Screw Products Company. As the company's third president (O.G. Nelson had been the first), he continued a team operation that "drew heavily upon the heritage of preceding generations."

HUMAN ENGINEERING

That heritage, based on "human engineering," considered workers as associates. To further that concept presidents made weekly visits through the shops, visited with people in all phases of operation, concerned themselves with personal and business problems by listening and by offering solutions or words of encouragement.

MANAGEMENT STYLE

Company officers did not isolate themselves, but rather worked in a general

office. In a 1980 *Register Star* interview with Ben Rubendall, Lidbetter explained: "If a person has a question...I can answer in a minute and they can be back at work."

CAREER ADVANCEMENTS

Having joined the firm as an accountant, January 2, 1941, he rose through the ranks: assistant shift superintendent, plant superintendent, vice-president of operations, board of directors and finally president.

COMPANY HISTORY

The company had been founded in 1929 by Swan Hillman, David Johnson, Thorwald Madsen and O.G. Nelson. Then twelve associates worked in a 1200-square foot plant on Railroad Avenue. Sales of wood screws in 1929 equaled \$40,000. In 1934 when the company relocated to a Ninth Street location, they had 103 associates and net sales

of \$700,000. Plant #2 and Plant #3 were added in 1943 and 1954, respectively, with headquarters at 707 Harrison Ave.

Reputedly, one of largest fastener companies in the United States, Rockford Product Corporation (new name assumed in 1971) produced not only standard screw products--nuts and bolts, but also specialty fasteners. Cold form products included 250,000 configurations in a complete range of sizes.

During Lidbetter's presidency, two new companies were formed. In Elk Grove and later (1982) in Rockford, Rockford International covered a portion of the market lost to imports. The parent company monitored and inspected Asian-made products for resale, guaranteeing quality. Rockford Aerospace Products Company, incorporated in

California in 1968, targeted jet engine manufacturers. That venture closed in 1981.

Banner years for sales and production occurred in the 70s, rising from \$35 million in 1968 to \$71 million in 1975. In October 1976, Rexnord of Milwaukee purchased the corporation. (Eight years later, under president Jack Rauh, associates would buy the firm back from Rexnord.)

DECISIONS, DECISIONS

Although Lidbetter enjoyed responsibilities, yet he agonized over decisions to lay off associates and to reduce work schedules to eight-hour shifts during the late 70s. Declining orders due to fewer housing starts and auto-related downturns, precipitated cutbacks. A sign posted on a company bulletin board, "The Ward giveth and The Ward taketh away," injected wry humor. In a *Newsletter* column, he promised to "return to

regular work schedules and to recall those on layoff as soon as business conditions permit."

RETIREMENT

When retirement loomed eminent, Lidbetter worked with then vice-president Gerald Broski grooming him for the presidency. In his final *Newsletter* (August 1980), Lidbetter wrote: "It is the major responsibility of any chief executive to be certain his successor is trained and capable of continuing successful operations and further developing company security."

Broski concurs that Lidbetter was successful at being not only a teacher, a boss, but also a friend. "Possessed with a warm touch of friendship, he was never offensive, always objective," says Broski.

PERSONAL DATA

A native of West Allis, Wisconsin, Lidbetter earned

a degree from Beloit College. In Rockford, he belonged to Masonic Lodge 102, Freeport Consistory, Tebala Shrine Temple and the Royal Order of Jesters. He served on boards at Rockford College, NICOR, Second Congregational Church, Swedish American Hospital, American National Bank (now Amcore), Colonial Bank, and J.L. Clark.

He is survived by his wife Virginia, daughter Ginger (Michael) Monson, sons Gordon and Jack (Barbara) Lidbetter and four grandchildren. Virginia recalls her late husband's wonderful sense of humor, his thoughtfulness, kindness and faith.

Such traits endeared him to family and friends alike.

Sources: Broski, Jerry--interview. ROCKFORD Newsletters, 1972-1980; Lidbetter, Virginia. Obituary notice, Rockford Register Star, Dec. 13, 1997. Rubendall, Ben. Rockford Register Star, August 31, 1980.

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Statement of Purpose: To enlighten and to educate people about their place of residence, to entertain with stories and fact, and to enrich lives regarding what is available to enjoy, to treasure and to honor.

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