

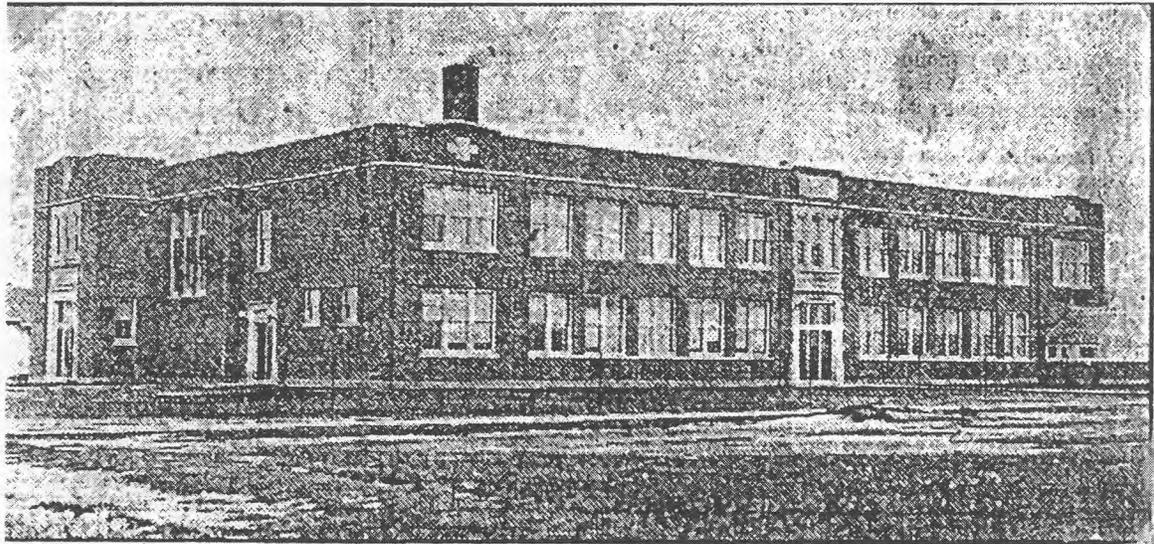
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# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 41 DECEMBER 2003 NUMBER 4

## HONONEGAH A NEW BIOGRAPHY

By Dean McMakin



A photograph of Hononegah high school at the time of its dedication in February 1923. The school was named after Hononegah, the Winnebago Indian wife of Stephen Mack. This photo was originally published in the Rockford Morning Star on February 14, 1923.

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## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents a Biography of Hononegah, the wife of Stephen Mack. Hononegah played an important part in the early history of Winnebago County. Although much has been written about her husband Stephen Mack, relatively little was known about Hononegah. Due to the extensive research done by Dean McMakin, that has changed. Dean has uncovered much information that has never been published before.

Dean McMakin is a native of Rockton and has been doing historical and genealogical research in the Rockton area for 35 years. He collects and researches local genealogies and has a special interest in the *Métis* families (These were people who were half white, usually French, and half Indian. They were the children of fur traders and their Indian wives.) Dean is the author of *The French Trappers and Traders, Friends of Stephen Mack and Residents of Pecatonic*. This is a collection of articles from books and periodicals containing anything of relevance pertaining to their lives. This volume is available at the Talcott Free Library. Dean is the great-great-grandson of Benjamin Franklin Richardson, the first white male born in Roscoe Township. He also plays in the Rockford Wind Ensemble.

## NOTICE TO RESEARCHERS

If you have a subject that you have researched, or an idea for an article that you would like to pursue, give me a call. I would like to encourage original research into some aspects of local history that have not been adequately pursued. I can be reached at 885-1740.

Thomas Powers, Editor

# HONONEGAH-A NEW BIOGRAPHY

## HONONEGAH'S CHILDHOOD

The native cultures that occupied Illinois and Wisconsin had a very different system for the naming of children. The cultures automatically designated names to children based upon gender and birth order. To deal with the expected confusion of having a village of children with the same names, children resorted to nicknames. When the child entered adulthood and met with the cultural expectations to be considered being an adult, the person would then receive a clan name. Adult names always identified the clan to which the person belonged.

The Winnebago always named the eldest daughter *Hinnu*, sometimes also seen as *Hinnunay*. From the naming system the Winnebago's used, we can identify Hononegah as being the eldest daughter in her family.

In a treaty signed November 1, 1837 at Washington, the government removed the Winnebago from Wisconsin and sent them to a reservation in Iowa. There were certain provisions in the treaty in which Indian traders could be compensated by the government for monetary losses incurred, since the people who owed the traders money were being removed and would not be able to pay their debts. Traders were also entitled to credits on behalf of their half-breed children. A commission was convened in 1838 to accept and process claims, and on August 29, 1839 Stephen Mack filed his affidavit. This document has now been published, and it dispels many of the myths about Hononegah's family and background.

Honegah was born in or about the year 1814. The place of her birth is not known for certain, but circumstantial evidence points to the region that the Indians called Taychoperah, the Four Lakes Country, which would later become the site of Madison, Wisconsin. The Winnebago name of her father has not survived. Mack calls him Blacksmith, and he died in the Four Lakes Country in or about the year 1821. Mack knows that he was at least one-half Winnebago, and it is probable that he was a full blood. It would appear that Mack might not have known Hononegah's father. The mother of Hononegah was Inoquer. She was a full-blooded Winnebago and had been deceased a number of years prior to 1839. Hononegah had a sister named Wehunsegah. Hononegah was considered an orphan and was raised by uncles. They were Conosaipkah (also known as Little Black), Estche-eshesheek, and Horohonkak. At the signing of the treaty, Conosaipkah was the only uncle still alive, and he was residing in the Prairie du Chien area (In 1833 Mack was entitled to compensation by terms of a treaty with the Pottawatomie for his two children. Perhaps Hononegah was one-quarter Pottawatomie).

Circumstantial evidence suggests that Hononegah's uncles took her to the Grand Detour area after her father's death in 1821. In the affidavit, Mack states that he had resided in the Rock River area since 1820, and it is quite possible that Hononegah was not residing at Grand Detour when Mack arrived there.

All of the romances about Hononegah claim that she was a Pottawatomie, but we know now that she was or practically was a full-blood Winnebago. To further support this, the native village at Grand Detour where Hononegah met Stephen Mack was a Winnebago village. The village chief was named Jarro, named for Nicholas Jarrot, a French trader who operated at Cahokia for many years. Around 1812 Jarrot was in Prairie du Chien, when a group of men descended upon him with the intent of killing him. Suddenly the men heard a blood-curdling war hoop, and a man

descended upon them with such energy that the group quickly dispersed sparing Jarrot's life. This event was commemorated by those who witnessed it by renaming the brave man Jarro, and he was known by that name for the remainder of his life. Jarro would become a principle chief of the Winnebago. He and three others signed the treaties of 1829 and 1837.

### **THE ARRIVAL OF STEPHEN MACK**

The husband of Hononegah was Stephen Mack, who was born at Tunbridge, Orange County, Vermont on February 2, 1798, the son of Stephen and Temperance (Bond) Mack. In 1807 Stephen Mack, Sr. left his wife and twelve children in Vermont to set up a mercantile business in Detroit, Michigan, and he was the first English-speaking man to do so in that settlement. His firm Mack and Conant was a trading company, and remained prominent for many years. Stephen, Sr. insisted that his children remain in Vermont to receive good educations. Stephen, Jr. attended Moors Charity School; a preparatory school located in Hanover, New Hampshire from 1813 to 1816, and attended college for awhile in Boston, until an illness forced him to drop out. He joined his father in Detroit in the fall of 1818 and probably became an employee of Mack and Conant. At that time the major competitor of Mack and Conant was The American Fur Company.

Stephen Mack's travels, first to Green Bay, and then to Illinois, were probably an attempt to set up trading posts to compete with The American Fur Company. But then in 1821, Mack and Conant went out of business, and The American Fur Company bought out their rights. Mack accepted employment in The American Fur Company and remained with them in various capacities until 1847. Mack eventually reached Grand Detour where he joined Pierre Lasallier (perhaps his full name was Pierre St. Clair *dit* Lasallier), an old business veteran who had been operating trading posts on the Rock and Illinois Rivers since 1793. Edson Carr's *History of Rockton* leads us to believe that Mack was an adventurer with no specific goals, and that the reason he ended up in Grand Detour in present day Ogle County was because of a wrong turn. It is much more probable that Mack knew that Lasallier was operating a trading post at Grand Detour and that his intention from the beginning was to join him. The trading post was located on Franklin Creek, about thirty-five rods from the Rock River (In 1835 Joseph Crawford came upon the ruins of the cabin. All that remained were some log timbers and vestiges of a cellar).

From the before-mentioned affidavit, Mack states that he had operated on the Rock River since 1820. Lasallier held trading licenses for the years 1821 and 1822; Mack most probably worked for Lasallier as a clerk, a standard business practice for the company. Mack was issued his first license on October 20, 1823, followed by licenses for September 6, 1824, and October 5, 1826. It has been also noted that Lasallier did not have licenses for those years, which supports the belief that Mack's early employment was in the capacity of a clerk.

### **THE COURTSHIP AND MARRIAGE OF HONONEGAH AND STEPHEN MACK**

The Winnebago (and also the Pottawatomie) did not observe any formalized celebration of marriage. The couple would approach their families and announce their intentions to be together. The families of the bride and groom would get

together for a meal and exchange gifts. In Winnebago culture, there was much emphasis placed on the bride price. Stephen Mack was a trader, and in the eyes of the Winnebago, he was considered a wealthy man. There is a tradition that Mack gave Hononegah's family two fine horses, two saddles, and two blankets for her. This, if true, was a fine bride price and is in keeping with Winnebago custom.

In the trading profession, it was nearly inevitable that a trader would take a mate from the peoples that he did business with. Stephen Mack would follow in that tradition, but not immediately. We do not know when Hononegah and Stephen Mack met or under what circumstances. There is only a shadowy tradition handed down that Mack was delirious with fever and that Hononegah cared for him, a case of the patient falling in love with the caregiver. Mack waited until the advanced age of thirty-one years to pick a mate, and when he did so, his intended was an orphan girl of only fifteen.

We might be able to somewhat approximate the time of their union. In February of 1829, Lasallier deeded his cabin to Mack. This acquisition may be interpreted as an expression of Mack's wish to have a better environment in which he would raise his family, but also Lasallier was over eighty years old by that time and was ready to retire. Researchers believe that Hononegah gave birth to her first child during the course of 1829, the child dying an infant. Also the birth of the child was not recorded in the Mack family bible. The eldest child of Hononegah was Rosa Mack who was born November 14, 1830.

There is evidence that the marriage of Hononegah and Stephen Mack was very unpopular with the villagers. Mrs. Fenton Smith was a daughter of Selvey K. Blodgett, an early settler to the Rockton area. Her diary came to light after her death, and excerpts were published in the April 20, 1925 issue of the *Beloit Independent*. It quotes, "My brothers, sisters, went across the river to a school which a man by the name of Mack taught. He had married an Indian maid for (a) wife. This maiden was Hononegah. The Indians were very angry about it and would hide in bushes around trying to kill him. After a while she interceded and reconciled them."

Stephen Mack and Hononegah were forced to flee Grand Detour. There are three versions of the story. The first version appears in the *History of Rock County* published in 1879 under the general editorship of C.W. Butterfield. Stephen Mack had influence with the local chief and became an advisor to him. The villagers held Mack in suspect for his influence over their chief, and also because Mack had not married a woman from their village, as it was customary for traders to do. It is said that other white men came in contact with the villagers who became jealous of Mack's influence over village affairs, and they successfully turned them against Mack convincing the villagers that Mack was shortchanging them. Hononegah warned Mack of a plot to kill him. Mack escaped the village with the malcontents pursuing him for an entire day before he was finally free of them. While in Chicago, Mack negotiated by messenger with the villagers, hoping to make way for his safe return to the village. Mack returned to the village in time, and all seemed well. But the malcontents had coaxed Mack to come back to the village in order to lay a new trap for him. Hononegah warned Mack on the new attempt on his life and hid him in a barrel. Out of gratitude for saving his life on these two occasions, Mack married Hononegah. He was eventually adopted into the tribe. The editor claims to have decided to publish the story after interviewing enough Beloit residents who were familiar with it and who believed it themselves.

The second version is given in Carr's *History of Rockton* published in 1898, and it is the more romantic of the two versions. Stephen Mack refuses to sell liquor and firearms to the villagers. They do not like this treatment, so while Mack is away in Chicago, a plot is devised to ambush and kill him when he returns. In this version Hononegah is already married to Mack. She learns of the murder plot and succeeds to meet Mack before he can return to the village. They flee to Bird's Grove where the villagers there promise to provide protection for them.

The third version was published at a later time in *The Rock River Valley*, Vol. I., under the general editorship of Royal Brunson Way. In this version Mack is a subject of suspicion, because he will not sell them liquor and firearms, and also because he has not married one of their women. He is also charged with using his influence to benefit other traders at the expense of the villagers. Hononegah warns Mack of a plot to kill him. Mack, while being pursued by villagers, flees to Chicago. In time he returns to the village with a guarantee for his safety, but the villagers attempt to murder him again. Hononegah hides him in a barrel while Mack's lodge was surrounded by bloodthirsty villagers. Mack marries Hononegah out of gratitude, and he is adopted into the tribe. It is also suggested that he married Hononegah to placate them in their suspicions that he didn't want to marry one of their women. But all is yet not well. Mack is returning from Chicago with more goods than he ever has in the past. The villagers know this, and they decide to rob and murder him when he arrives. Hononegah learns of the plot and meets Mack before he can return to the village. Together they flee for Bird's Grove. This latter version is a melding of the two previous versions and may have been created for the purpose of reconciling the two earlier versions; therefore one must hold this version suspect.

### **BIRD'S GROVE AND THE BLACK HAWK WAR**

Stephen Mack and Hononegah fled Grand Detour probably in 1829. They found refuge at a Winnebago village where the inhabitants agreed to protect them, located at the mouth of Dry Creek and the Rock River. Later settlers knew this area as Bird's Grove. It received its name from Frederick Bird who held the original deed to the property in 1839. It was a private park for many years before the property was sold to the Winnebago County Forest Preserve in 1924 and renamed Hononegah Forest Preserve. Mack built a trading post there. In 1898 when Edson Carr published his Rockton history, the remnants of the old fireplace could still be seen. Today we no longer know the exact site of the cabin. It is believed that it stood somewhere between Dry Creek and the public boat landing.

The tranquil lives of Hononegah and Stephen Mack were interrupted by the Black Hawk War of 1832. The Sauk and Fox people under the leadership of Black Hawk were forced to migrate up the Rock River into Wisconsin, and Mack's trading post lie immediately in the way. In a letter to his sister Lovicy Cooper dated May 30, 1832; Mack indicated that he and his wife were forced to flee to Chicago on May 9<sup>th</sup>. In the affidavit Mack filed at Prairie du Chien in 1839, Mack indicates that Black Hawk's warriors had raided his cabin in search of gunpowder, which he successfully hid from them. It is not known whether it was this incident that forced Mack and his family to flee. We know that Mack was successful in persuading the villagers from siding with Black Hawk's warriors. Most of the accounts indicate that Mack fled Bird's Grove only after the villagers were no longer able to guarantee his safety.

On the 14<sup>th</sup> of May, five days after Mack had fled Bird's Grove, the Battle of Stillman's Run was fought southwest of present-day Rockford. On the 24<sup>th</sup> of May Stephen Mack enlisted in Captain John S. C. Hogan's company of militia and was made a sergeant. It was much to the advantage of the army to have Mack with them, since he was one of the very few men at that time who was familiar with northern Illinois and southern Wisconsin. In the previously mentioned letter to his sister, Mack said that his company was too small to be effectual. He saw no action. The only event of importance that had occurred during his enlistment was when his company arrived at the aftermath of the Indian Creek Massacre (which took place May 20<sup>th</sup>) at the Davis home on Indian Creek some twelve miles north of Ottawa, Illinois where fifteen whites were slain. By about the second week of June, army regulars from Michigan began arriving in Illinois to continue the war, and by mid-June Mack's company of militia was dissolved.

Now we need to dispose of the romance in *The History of Rockton*: "It is said that the feeling was so strong against Mack during the visit of Black Hawk, that the chief of the tribe advised him to go away for a time for personal safety. Accordingly he privately went to an island in the river, now known as Webber's island, where he was supplied with food and fresh water by his faithful wife until it was safe for him to return. This may be an actual fact or a romance, but it is given for what it is worth." There is no evidence that Stephen Mack ever met Black Hawk. Mack was a prominent enough person for Black Hawk to be aware of him. He or his warriors would know where Mack was and would know that he had gunpowder. The chronology in Edson Carr's history is incorrect. Carr assumes that the Battle of Stillman's Run occurred before Black Hawk reached Bird's Grove. We have the proof in Mack's letter to his sister that he had fled Bird's Grove prior to the Battle of Stillman's Run. The Webber's Island story, as it is presented in Carr's history, cannot be supported. Even Carr seems not to have believed it. If it is true that Mack went to Webber's Island for his own safety, his sojourn there can no longer be placed in context with the events as we presently understand them.

## THE FOUNDING OF PECATONIC

On July 25, 1835 William Talcott and his son Thomas Blish Talcott visited the Mack family at Bird's Grove. During the course of their visit, Mack announced his intentions to found a new community on the south bluff overlooking the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers, which he would call Pecatonic. Mack believed that the Rock River was navigable into Wisconsin for a distance of 150 miles while the Pecatonica River was navigable for 100 miles. Mack's idealized community would be a center of merchandizing and trade. The Talcott's held a very different vision. They were interested in the area's water resources. They wanted to run a gristmill and were also interested in other possible applications of waterpower.

The old histories say that Stephen Mack was the original owner of all the land which became Pecatonic and what is now the Macktown Forest Preserve, but this is not true. The original claimant was a French trapper and trader, and who, like Mack, was employed by The American Fur Company. His name was Joseph Thiebeau (pronounced Te-bo). Thiebeau came to this country from Canada in 1824, and his area of activity extended all along the Rock River as far north as Lake Koshkonong. Thiebeau had two wives. The older wife was about his age and was half Winnebago, half Pottawatomie. The other wife was Lisette Lasallier, a young and pretty half-

breed of French and Winnebago blood (all contemporary accounts attest to her attractiveness). In 1835 Thiebeau built a cabin at Turtle village straddling the state line. He and Caleb Blodgett are considered the first white residents of Beloit. But Thiebeau did not remain there for long. With the tide of new immigration into the area, Thiebeau withdrew to Lake Koshkonong (Thiebeau's Point is named for him).

Joseph Thiebeau disappeared in January of 1839, and the mystery of his disappearance has never been resolved. Thiebeau was prone to drunken rages in which he became violent with his family members. The most popular accounts claim that his wives and children finally murdered him and disposed of his body by chopping a hole in the lake ice. However there is evidence that he may have died in some accidental mishap that obscured all traces of his remains.

In a treaty signed at Prairie du Chien on August 1, 1829, the Winnebago's agreed to relinquish claims to all lands lying between the Rock and Mississippi Rivers. This treaty contained provisions which persons who were half white, half Winnebago could buy the rights to select a section of land within this area, or a parent could purchase the right on behalf of their half breed children. Joseph Thiebeau bought the rights to select a section on behalf of his daughter Therese, and the section he wanted would contain the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers.

In 1829 Winnebago County did not exist as yet, nor had the area been surveyed. The county was not surveyed until the fall of 1836. Thiebeau and other persons like himself who claimed sections could not know the boundaries of their claims until after they were surveyed, so these sections were known as "floats". After the county was surveyed, it was determined that the area containing the confluence of the Rock and Pecatonica Rivers fell within section 23 of Rockton Township. On January 17, 1838 Thiebeau sold the section to Jean Baptiste Beaubien, a well-known Indian trader who had plied his trade in Chicago for many years. By June of 1838 Beaubien was a partner to Stephen Mack, along with John P. Bradstreet, formerly of Chicago and later of Burlington, Iowa.

The Talcott's remained with the Mack's a few days and then departed Bird's Grove to return for their families and belongings. They returned to the Rockton area that fall and discovered that the Mack family had already left Bird's Grove for their new home at Pecatonic. We can safely assume that they lived in a cabin for the next four years, however no record has come down to us where the cabin was located or what happened to it after the family moved into their final residence. Perhaps it was the log building some distance west of the house which Mack later operated his business. Also near the house was a barn.

The fine two-story frame house in which the Mack's resided is now one of the only two buildings that remain at Pecatonic that are still on their original foundations (because of their superstitious natures the Indians insisted on calling the settlement Macktown). Mack made out very well from the 1837 treaty and received more than seven thousand dollars from the government. He built the house in 1839, and much of the money he received went towards improvements to his new community, such as the bridge over the river built at his expense. After their deaths the Mack home was occupied by a number of owners. The Macktown Forest Preserve was created in 1926, and the home became the residence of the caretaker until 1950 when the house had fallen into such disrepair that the forest preserve district announced their intentions to tear it down. Alarm bells went off throughout the community, and as a result the Rockton Historical Society was founded. The house was saved and converted into a museum, which it has been ever since, and has been kept in good repair.

## HONONEGAH'S CHILDREN

When Stephen Mack died in 1850, most of his children were legally minors. They were given guardians who numbered amongst Mack's friends and relatives, and they were taken to Michigan, Wisconsin and Minnesota to be raised. Because of the scattering of these children, we do not as yet know all about their personal histories and the histories of their descendants. The genealogy of the descendants of Hononegah is very much a work in progress.

Rosa Mack was born November 14, 1830. She was a deaf mute and was sent to a school for the deaf in Jacksonville, Illinois for her education. There she met another student, a Mr. Leonard whom she married. They are believed to have a child who died an infant.

Mary Mack was born July 15, 1832. She married firstly to Charles Stocker who was killed during the Civil War. By him she had one son and four daughters. Mary married secondly to Isaac Justin Terrill, born in 1815, who was of French and Cree ancestry. By him Mary had one son and two daughters. Isaac died in 1878. Mary died at St. Paul, Minnesota in July of 1917.

William Harrison Mack was born July 15, 1834. He married Julia Stocker and resided in Wisconsin. The town of Viola in Richland County is said to be named for their daughter. It is believed that William was the father of two children.

Louisa Mack was born May 6, 1836. She married Ladawick Lawrence Curtis and resided at Glen Flora, Chippewa County, Wisconsin. They had five sons and one daughter.

Thomas Hartzell Mack was born February 9, 1838 and was said to reside in Michigan. He is said to marry and to be the father of a son who resided in Minnesota.

Henry Clay Mack was born December 1, 1840 and died January 1, 1848. He was buried with his parents.

Edward Mack was born December 3, 1841. During the Civil War he served as a drummer and was killed.

Matilda Mack was born November 26 1843. She married at Menominee, Wisconsin July 20, 1868 to Edwin Harry Drake, born in Mansfield, Massachusetts July 16, 1841. Matilda died at Eau Galle, Dunn County, Wisconsin on November 12, 1889. Edwin died there December 22, 1895. She is buried at Wabeque Cemetery. They were the parents of two sons and one daughter. The eldest son Alson Drake (1869-1911) married Winefred Arthur and had Myrla Drake (born 1902) who married Eldon Joseph Erickson. Their daughter Geraldine Erickson (born 1929) married Carroll Gullickson. Their daughter Barbara Gullickson married Dan Kelly, a Rockford transplant to Wisconsin. He decided to move his family to the Rockford area, and by doing that he unwittingly made it possible for his children Ryan and Meghan Kelly to be the first two descendants of Hononegah to ever attend Hononegah High School.

Caroline Mack was born October 16, 1845. She married firstly to May 7, 1861 to Edward Shippy Cook, and by him she was the mother of a son and daughter. They separated in 1875, and in October of 1877 Caroline married secondly to Arthur E. Newberry. By him she had one son. Caroline Newberry, along with her son and daughter, attended the dedication of Hononegah High School in February of 1923... She died six months later in Pontiac, Michigan August 28, 1923 and was buried at Rochester Cemetery.

There are two other children claimed for her whom died as infants. A child was born during 1829, and her last child was born and died, it is claimed, in July of 1847 (contrary to some older reports, Hononegah did not die from childbirth).

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NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, 6526 Spring Brook Rd., Rockford, Illinois 61114. Society members receive NUGGETS upon payment of annual dues. New rates, effective January 1, 1998: Family @ \$15, Individual @ \$10, Contributing member @ \$25, Life member @ \$150. Mail check to: Membership Chairman, Rockford Historical Society, 6799 Guilford Rd., Rockford, IL 61107.

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