

\*\*\*\*\*

# NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 43 JUNE 2005 NUMBER 2

## CHERRY VALLEY BEGINNINGS

By John Larson



The old gristmill was built about 1850. This photo was taken around the turn of the century. Photo courtesy of Cherry Valley Historical Society.

## THE HISTORY OF ARGYLE

By Wallace Ralston

## MARY LYFORD'S DIARY - 1896

By Carrie A. Meyer

\*\*\*\*\*

## FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents three articles that I felt belonged together.

Two of the articles tell about the early history of two small towns on the eastern edge of Winnebago County, Cherry Valley and Argyle. *Cherry Valley's Beginnings* was written by John Larson. Mr. Larson is a lifelong resident of Cherry Valley and an active member of the Cherry Valley Historical Society. *The History of Argyle* was written by Wallace Ralston. Mr. Ralston is a retired farmer whose roots in the Argyle community go back several generations. His source material includes journals kept by his father and grandfather. He also is a Marine veteran of World War II who fought at Iwo Jima.

The third article tells the story of a young girl who grew up on a farm between the two communities mentioned above. Mary Lyford left extensive diaries that tell the story of farming in northern Illinois from the 1890s to the 1940s. Carrie Meyers has written a short introduction to Mary's life as a young girl in 1896 based on these journals. She is also working with her later diaries and hopes to write a book about farming and the agricultural community in the first half of the twentieth century. Dr. Meyer is an Associate Professor of Economics at George Mason University. She has published two books and numerous academic papers. She is also an avid gardener.

## 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

## CHERRY VALLEY'S BEGINNING

By John Larson

The first permanent settler, at what is now Cherry Valley, was Joseph P. Griggs. He built a house on the west side of the river in 1836. He was followed by a Mr. A. C. Gleason and his brother Mr. W. Gleason and in 1837 by S. W. Gleason and Densly Kizer. Mr. Griggs and his son Calvin built a grist mill on the west side of the river and also operated a boat to ferry travelers across the river in high water. The small settlement was known as Griggs Ford.

At that time Cherry Valley township was known as Butler Precinct until the stage coach mail service began and it was determined that there was another Butler in Illinois. Names were drawn from a hat and Cherry Valley was drawn. This name was placed into the hat by a lady who previously lived in Cherry Valley, New York.

About the same time that Cherry Valley was settled, another settlement was established about a mile and a half up the river. This was called Newburg. This is where Newburg Road crosses the Kishwaukee River today. Both settlements had a hotel, a gristmill, general stores, and blacksmith shops. Newburg, at one time, had a chair factory.

Both settlements prospered until the Chicago and Galena Union Railroad began to build its line from Chicago to Rockford. Both villages wanted to be a station but when a group of Belvidere citizens lead by W. H. Gilmon procured a right of way on the south side of the Kishwaukee River, it was decided to cross the river at Cherry Valley, leaving Newburg a mile off the line.

The citizens of Newburg were quite unhappy about this and referred to Butler and afterward Cherry Valley as "grab-all". Newburg then went into a decline and by the end of the Civil War, it had disappeared. The mill was torn down in the 1880's and the hotel in the 1890s. Today there is a farmhouse on Shaw Road that dates back to the days of Newburg. Part of the mill race along Beaver Creek is still visible.

With the coming of the railroad Cherry Valley became a shipping center for the area. At one time it had three grain warehouses (elevators), stockyards, two hotels, and a busy business district. In about 1850 a new grist mill was built on the west bank of the river at the foot of a mile long millrace. [See photo on cover] This ran along the foot of the hill below the cemetery. The dam was located where the toll road crosses the Kishwaukee River.

The mill produced flour and also ground feed for area farmers. About 1900 an electric generator was installed at the mill to produce power for the electric lights for the village. This was run by water power. About 1905 an engine was installed in the mill to run the mill and generator when the river was low or in flood. The quarry on the west side of the mill road was flooded at one time and a barge was loaded with stone to be poled up the race to the dam when repairs had to be made.

About the time of World War I, a tornado wrecked the third floor of the mill and a flat roof was installed on the second floor. Also at this time the stone buhrs were removed and modern feed grinding machinery was installed to grind animal feed. The mill ran on water power as late as 1940. In 1951 the machinery was removed and most of the building was torn down. In 1963 what remained was burned and the site became the turn lane at the west end of the bridge. The waste gate is still in place that was used to divert the millrace when work was necessary on the turbine. This is north of the west end of the bridge along with an iron ring in the cement wall where the maintenance barge was tied.

In the late 1840s Cherry Valley had two school houses. White School located on the east side of the river on the village green for the younger students, and Brown School located on the hill on the west side of the river for the older students.

In 1859 a new school house, three stories high, was built at the east edge of the village. It had three classrooms on the first floor, three classrooms on the second floor, and a large auditorium on the third floor. There was a high tower on the north west side of the building with a large fancy belfry on top. For years this was one of the finest school buildings in this area.



The Cherry Valley School.  
Photo courtesy of the Cherry Valley Historical Society

In 1938 a gymnasium was built to the south side of this building. In the middle 1950s the 1869 portion of the building was raised in a two stage program and new classrooms were built.

In 1869 a fire destroyed most of the business district on the south side of State St. It was soon rebuilt of brick which was made in a kiln on the west side of the river, south of the railroad. The new school house was also built of these bricks.

At one time broom corn was an important crop in the area and two local farmers, John Brown and Hugh Macky each grew about three hundred acres which gave employment to fifty to sixty men. In the 1880s the wage for hoeing broom corn was one dollar a day for adults and fifty cents for children.

From the time the railroad came through until the 1890s, Cherry Valley remained unincorporated, though a busy trade center. In February of 1896 a petition was circulated amongst the three hundred residents of section one of Cherry Valley township. This was a square mile containing the village and was signed by:

B. E. Brown	F. E. Stockwell	L. A. Stringer
T. W. Lee	B. H. Bean	F. O. Peterson
Oscar King	F. Garrett	G. F. Cromer
L. W. King	S. W. Shirley	Fayette Adams
Wm. Slater, Sr.	H. D. Traveller	C. R. Kling
L. Stringer	W. P. Woodard	J. Johnson
E. J. Carlson	H. H. Traveller	Andrew Culhane
Garrett Healey	C. H. Noel	Luke Burke
Luke Kehoe	N. N. Akerly	W. J. Slater
Wm. P. Buck	J. H. Jeffrey	G. A. Crosby
D. M. Packard	W. W. Adams	

This petition was presented to Rufus C. Bailey, Judge of Winnebago County Court, to organize Cherry Valley as a village. On March 17, 1896, an election was held in Sanborus Hall with T. M. Lee, S. E. Hall, and Oscar King as judges. By a vote of eighty to twenty-four, the village of Cherry Valley was allowed to organize.

# THE HISTORY OF ARGYLE

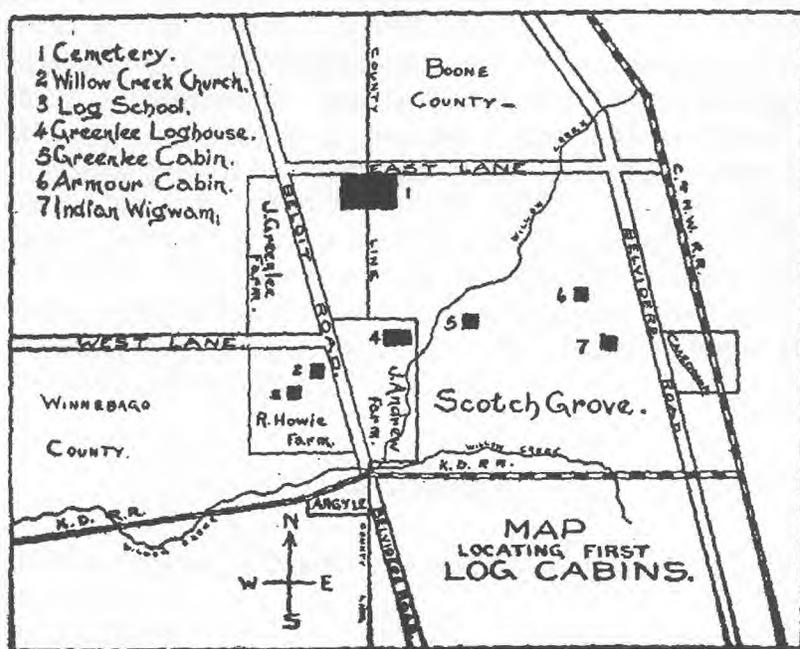
By Wallace Ralston

The Village of Argyle is located about  $\frac{3}{4}$  mile south of the junction of Route #173 and Belvidere Road, where Belvidere Road and Argyle Road meet. Willow Creek runs along the north side of the village. This area was settled by Scots from the District of Kintyre in Argyleshire, Scotland. Kintyre is a peninsula in the southern part of Argyleshire.

In 1859, the Northwestern Railway Company built a rail line from Rockford to Caledonia. This became known as the K. D. for Kenosha Division. Irishmen from Wisconsin built the road. They brought their families with them. They built a village of shanties about a mile west of the present village. A few years ago some of the foundations could still be seen. Every family kept a number of dogs so the locals called it Dog Town and the name stuck. Some of these families located on land east of Argyle and the Dog Town name followed.

When the railroad was completed in 1859, John Andrew, founder of the village of Argyle bought forty acres of land from Alexander Reid in order to get a site for a depot. He then petitioned the railroad company for a station and it was granted.

Mr. Andrew, with his sons, built a store and grain elevator. They conducted a general business in lumber, coal, and livestock up to the time it was sold to the Ralston Brothers.



Map published in *The Argyle Settlement in History and Story* by Daniel G. Harvey. Copyright Rockford, Illinois 1924.

The stockyards stood west of the lumber shed. There was a scale for weighting livestock. The farmers would drive cattle from the farms with the help of neighbors. Hogs came by wagon. In 1926, 64 carloads of livestock were shipped to Chicago, totaling 3,570 animals with the value of \$119,033.84. The livestock association was dissolved on February 2, 1934. By this time trucks were taking over the hauling of livestock to Chicago.

The grain elevator and mill was sold in the 1970s to Robert Bock for use as a saw mill making pallets. The mill was destroyed by fire on June 10, 1978. There is still a saw mill on the premises.

The first village school was built in 1870 at the northwest corner of Argyle Rd and Grove St. This was a one room school. The second school was built in 1922 at a cost of \$21,000.

The old school served later as a garage and a bachelors club called the Royal Purple Roosters. World War II and marriage caused the demise of the club. Later it was moved across Argyle Road and is still used as a residence.

The brick school built in 1922 at the northwest corner of Argyle and Main St. consisted of two class rooms and a room called the high school room used for meetings and school performances. There was also a gym. Two additions were built in the 1960s including a bigger gym. The last 8<sup>th</sup> grade graduating class was in 1971. The district became part of the Rockford School District although the school was used at different times for classes. The old brick building was used for storage for a number of years before being torn down. The additions are still being used for business purposes.

In the winter of 1936 the school was closed from January 23<sup>rd</sup> to February 20<sup>th</sup> because of the cold and snow. Coal was hard to get and when Ralston's could get a carload in they would call the farmers and they would come in with a bobsled and get a load.

Argyle also had a town hall that was used for dinners, dances and business. One incident in 1896, the floor fell in during a Republican rally. After the brick school was built, the town hall was not used a great deal. It was taken down after World War II.

Dave Andrew built a store after the railroad was built. That store burned down in 1909. A new one was constructed. It was a two story building. The upper story was used as an apartment. Over the years there have been a number of owners. An owner in the early 1900s moved to Rockford and had the Smoke Shop on West State St. He was murdered during a holdup in 1933. The last store owner was Mark Rohr. He remodeled the store into an apartment and it is still being used.

The name of the post office was first called Kintyre, in honor of the district they had come from in Scotland. But later there proved to be another Kintyre in the

state so the name was changed to Argyle. The post office was in the store. It was closed in 1934 and the mail has since then come from Caledonia. The last postmaster was Tom Reed and the last mail carried was Rob McCorrie.

In 1884 a stock company creamery was organized. A charter and license was granted. The creamery manufactured the "Sweet Heather" brand of butter. In 1917 the creamery and dwelling house was sold to the Union Dairy Company of Rockford for \$2,500. The creamery was abandoned around 1930.

There was a blacksmith shop at the southeast corner of Argyle Road and Main St. From an old diary, a Mr. Clark started blacksmithing in 1893. Whether there was somebody earlier we have no knowledge. A Mr. Cox worked as a blacksmith in 1929 and the early 1930s. The last ones were Fred and Dave Bounds. By that time it was more car repair and machinery. The building was later used for a garage and storage for an antique dealer. The building was torn down in the 1960s.

Around 1930 Bill Schmidt put up a cement block building at the corner of Main and Belvidere Rd. There was one gas pump and one pool table. He sold pop, candy and ice cream. He also sold guns. Bill died by a self inflicted rifle wound in the 1950s.

At one time there was a stage coach stop along the Beloit Belvidere Road just east of the village called the Buckhorn.

Some other happenings, Argyle at one time had a doctor. In 1902 a new bridge was built across Willow Creek. In 1980 another new bridge was build. It was celebrated by a parade. In 1899 a grocer's picnic was held at Milwaukee. About 100 people from the area went to Argyle but the trains wouldn't stop. They all had to go home.

The Argyle Gun Club was organized about 1878. They started out shooting at targets but later changed to trap shooting at clay pigeons. Fifteen shots were fired by each person. The winner was given a badge to keep until the next year. An oyster supper was held a week later. The suppers were held in the town hall until the brick school was built in 1922. The suppers were then held in the school until the club was disbanded in 1965.

## SOURCES

Excerpts from *The Argyle Settlement in History and Story* by Daniel G. Harvey  
Peter Greenlee's Diary  
Thomas Ralston's Diary  
Wallace Ralston's memories.

## May Lyford's Diary, 1896 By Carrie A. Meyer

May Lyford Davis of Guilford Township began keeping a diary in 1896. After she married Elmo Davis on January 1, 1901, she also kept meticulous farm ledgers. She recorded all the income and expenses of their farm on Bell School Road for the next 43 years. The diaries she kept during her married life focused on farming activity. But in 1896, May was single and 22 years old – social life was the focus of her diary.

May lived with her parents, Joseph and Emily Lyford, and her brother Starr on the farm on the southeast corner of Bell School and Spring Creek Roads. Elmo lived with his mother across the road. He had managed the farm since his father died in 1892.

In 1896, May had little to say about Elmo, however. Despite the fact that May and her mother walked down the lane regularly to visit Elmo's mother and vice versa, Elmo came to call just once with Gertie Doolittle, who was teaching at Bell School.

But May had considerable contact with Elmo's family. Belle and Bertha Purdy, Elmo's half-nieces, regularly visited their grandmother and May came down the lane to see them, or they came up to visit her and her mother. Florence Davis Fitch and her mother Harriet Davis also regularly visited Elmo's mother, and May stopped to see them. May also called on Florence and her baby boy. May was in a club with Grace and Belle Davis, daughters of Elmo's Uncle Dan, and they got together regularly. When Elmo's cousin, Frank Davis married Mamie Dubois, May and her brother Starr attended the wedding.

Many other women from the neighborhood paid calls on May and her mother. The George Browns were living just north of the Lyford farm. There were Doolittles both to the south and to the east of the Lyford farm. The Breckenridges and Watsons lived to the northeast. The Hugh Browns lived north of the schoolhouse, near the Lakes and the Kirks. The Pickens also lived up to the north. There were Prices and Reids to the west and south of Elmo and his mother. The Ralstons and the Shaws were also over to the west.

In the winter months, May and Starr went to singing school on Saturday nights at the schoolhouse. May's Aunt Alice came out from Rockford to stay for about two weeks in the latter part of January. During that time, Mrs. Hugh Brown and her daughter Maggie came to quilt. In mid-February, Mr. H. Breckenridge hosted a leap year party. Later that month, May spent several days in Rockford with her Aunt Augusta. She called on friends and relatives, and went to a concert and to Stewart's cooking school.



A photo of May Lyford. Date unknown  
Reprinted with permission from Anne Davis Meyer

In the spring, Sunday school was reorganized at Bell School and May, her mother, and Starr attended; sometimes a preacher would come. Occasionally in the summer months, Starr and May went up to Argyle to the "Scotch Church." Uncle Dudley and Aunt Emma Lyford came down from Roscoe to pay a call in June. The Scotch held a picnic on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July, and May and Starr attended. One day in August, May took her friends Gertie Doolittle and Belle Davis up to Argyle in the buggy to visit Nettie McDonald. In early October, May hosted a large gathering of friends one evening; she spent a good part of two days riding around inviting people beforehand.

May wrote less about the work she did on the farm. The Lyfords had a hired boy, who worked through the summer and early fall, and again at corn husking time, but May's mother had no hired help. May spent considerable time working with her mother, and also with her father and brother, but she didn't make much of it. Of course there was washing, cleaning, churning, cooking, sewing, and baking to be done. (May noted "sewed" "churned," etc.) In March the family butchered two pigs about ten days apart and cut up the meat, rendered the lard, and made sausage and scrapple. The raspberries and blackberries required mulching in the spring. Then the cherries, the raspberries, and, later in the summer, the blackberries ripened and there was picking and canning to be done. In the late summer they canned tomatoes and picked apples and made cider and applesauce. May helped her father fix fences out in the pasture and helped him drive cows to Cherry Valley on at least one occasion.

May also recorded the fieldwork and the activities of her brother and father, although not as systemically as she recorded Elmo's activities later in life. After hauling ice to fill the icehouse, Starr cut wood much of the winter; he took grist to Rockford to have it ground, and hauled oats to town. In the spring he plowed, planted corn, and then cultivated. A man came to dehorn cattle in

April, and men came to put up a new windmill in June. Much of July went to making hay and stacking it in the barn. In August and September, Starr and the hired man threshed around the neighborhood and hauled stone and dirt for the barnyard. When the threshers came to the Lyfords', Papa got coal for the steam engine, and the thresher men spent the night in the barn. Then there was fall plowing with a new sulky plow. Some of the corn was cut and shocked in September. In early October, Papa and Starr dug potatoes, and Papa picked seed-corn – the best ears for next year's seed. Starr began husking in mid-October with the help of the hired man; the two men husked corn for more than two weeks.

May spent most of November and all of December with her cousins Kate and Puss in Wichita, Kansas. In early November, she and Starr took the train from Cherry Valley into Glen Ellyn; they spent a day there with relatives and went into Chicago the next day. May noted that they "go about city" but didn't mention what they saw. Then May took the 5:30 PM train to Wichita. She arrived 24 hours later, and her Uncle Moses and cousin Puss met her at the train station. She spent the rest of the year in Wichita, and made few notes in her diary while there.

At 22, May seemed to be a carefree young girl with an active social life; but she also spent a month in Rockford taking treatments for a disease that would begin to cripple her within the next few years. Rheumatoid arthritis left May unable to walk not long after she married. In 1896, May reported the treatments she received while in Rockford from April 29 to May 29. There were electric baths, cabinet baths, salt glows, a Swedish treatment, and galvanism. In amongst the treatments, she had an interesting month in the city. She stayed with her Aunt Augusta and visited friends, and went to church, choir, and socials. She went to a Greek play at the college and also heard a lecture on "the canal" one evening.

Despite her handicap, May and her husband Elmo had a full and happy life together on their farm in Guilford Township. May's diaries tell an epic tale of life on farm during the first 40 years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Agriculture was in its Golden Age from 1901 to 1920 and Northern Illinois farmers began buying cars by 1909. During World War I, when labor was scarce, many bought their first tractor. Even as land prices fell in the 1920s and the farm economy deteriorated, more and more Guilford farmers bought trucks and tractors. Then the Great Depression hit in the 1930s. May's diaries recount the bank failures, the blowing dust, and the severe droughts the farmers suffered in addition to very low prices for their crops. But together, Guilford farmers survived the Great Depression – Guilford Hope Grange was a vibrant social organization throughout the 1930s. By the late 1930s, Guilford farmers were buying new tractors with rubber tires and planting hybrid corn and soybeans.

May's diaries and ledgers from 1901 to 1944, form the basis for a book manuscript that tells the history of farming in Northern Illinois, through the Golden Age of Agriculture and the Great Depression. Opportunities for publishing that manuscript are currently being explored.

\*\*\*\*\*

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.

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.

2004-2005 Officers

President  
Vice-President  
Editor Emeritus  
Editor/Publisher  
Treasurer  
Secretary

Stephen Aarli  
John Johnson  
Robert Borden  
Thomas Powers  
Mary Lou Yankaitis  
Jean Lythgoe

We welcome manuscripts and photos to area historical events and personalities, for publication consideration. We reserve the right to edit and to condense. For return, please include a self-addressed stamped envelope. Send to NUGGETS EDITOR, ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY, 8658 ABERDEEN RD, CALEDONIA, IL 61011.

\*\*\*\*\*

ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
6799 Guilford Rd.  
Rockford, IL 61107

Non-Profit Org.  
U.S. POSTAGE  
PAID  
ROCKFORD, IL  
PERMIT NO. 320