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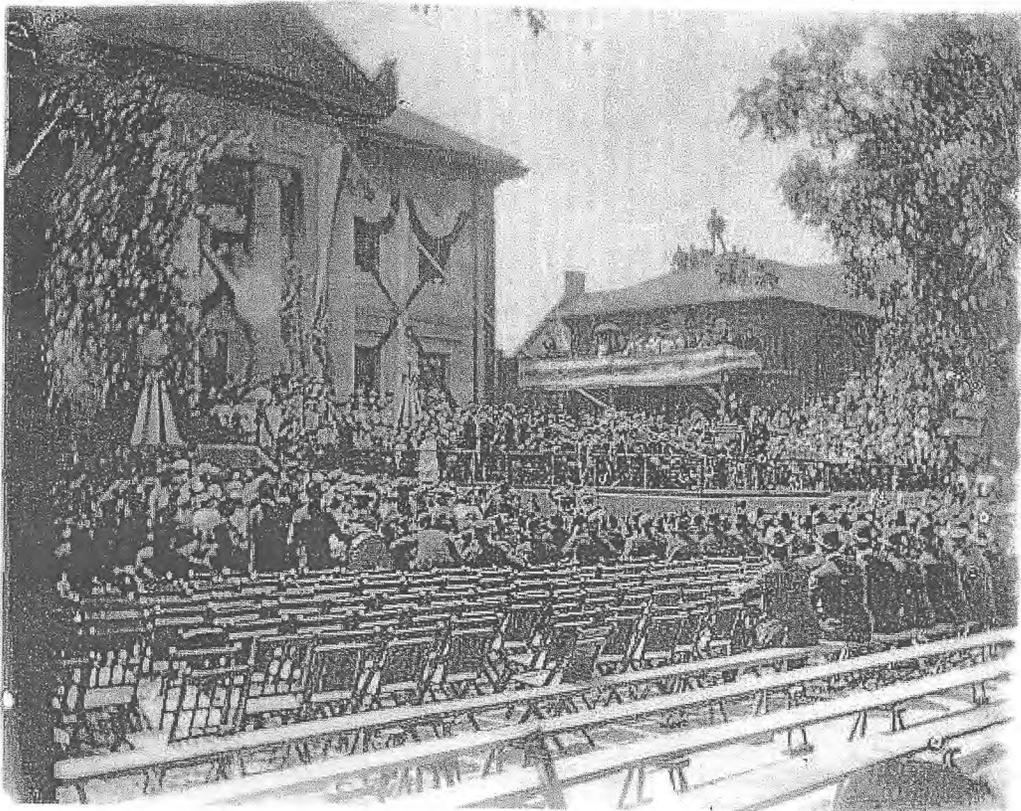
MEMORIAL HALL

By Jean Lythgoe

AND

THE HOME AND FAMILY OF LORENZO D. WALDO

By Robert H. Borden



The dedication of Memorial Hall, June 3, 1903
Photo from the Digital Past collection at www.rockfordpubliclibrary.org

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents two articles about Rockford History. The first presents a history of Memorial Hall, one of Rockford's lesser known gems. Memorial Hall contains one of the best collections of Civil War and military memorabilia in the country. It was the first of its kind in the country when it was dedicated by Theodore Roosevelt in 1903. The article was written by Jean Lythgoe. Jean is the Vice-President of the Rockford Historical Society. She has been a librarian in the adult services dept. of the Rockford Public Library for many years

The second article is a look back at one of Rockford's early families. It documents the history of the Waldo family and the house they lived in for nearly 90 years. Unfortunately this home was recently torn down. This article was written by Bob Borden. Bob was a founding member of the Rockford Historical Society. In addition to being a past President, Bob was the editor of the *Nuggets of History* for 28 years! As the current editor, that is quite an achievement. Bob is also a retired school teacher in the Rockford Public Schools.

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

UPCOMING LOCAL EVENTS

The Rockford Chapter DAR is planning a "Dinner with Thomas Jefferson" on Saturday, April 22, 2006 7:00 p.m. at the Rockford Country Club. Bill Barker, a well known Jefferson impersonator will join you for dinner. Dress in 18th century attire if you wish but costume is not required. Reservations are \$75.00 / person. Contact Judy Wilson-Sweet at 633-3758 for more information.

Memorial Hall is planning several upcoming events including a celebration on June 3rd to mark the 103rd anniversary of its dedication. This will feature Theodore Roosevelt. Watch the newspaper for more details.

MEMORIAL HALL

By Jean Lythgoe

As early as 1866, people wanted a memorial to honor the fallen soldiers from the Civil War. This theme was brought up several times over the years. Henry Andrus was in the legislature and succeeded in have the bill passed. On July 2, 1899, the legislative act was passed which gave county boards, with the consent of the voters, power to appropriate public funds for soldiers' memorial buildings. This was submitted to a popular vote in November 1900 and was ratified. Memorial Hall was the first building built in Illinois under that law.

Bradley and Carpenter were the architects and the contract for construction went to W. H. Cook. Construction began in 1901. The entire cost of the site, the building and the furnishings was \$59,136. The exterior of the building is Bedford stone, all of which was dressed here in Rockford. The land was the "Butterworth property. The lot of 132 x 156 feet was purchased for \$11,500. This figure is included in the \$59,136. It was the former site of the Ford carriage building.¹

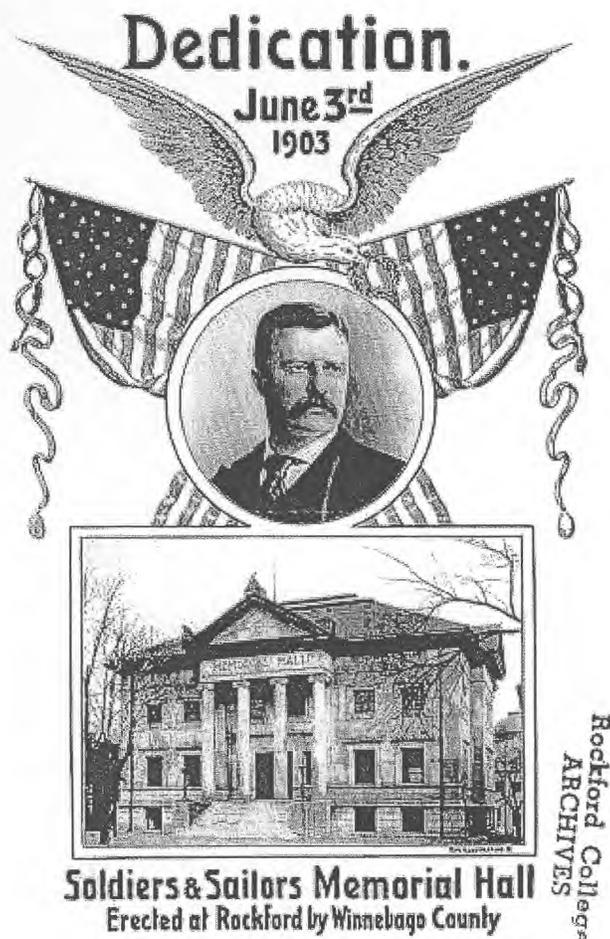
Memorial Hall, 211 N. Main Street, was dedicated June 3, 1903 by President Theodore Roosevelt. (In 1993, Edith Norberg says she vaguely remembers that day. Her father, David Carlson, took her, at age 2 ½, to the dedication. She said, "I remember my father lifting me up so I could get a good look at him.")²

The *Rockford Daily Republic* reported that thousands were seated, and thousands stood for the dedication during the relentless summer heat. J. B. Whitehead was chairman of the executive committee. The military band played a medley, and the combined Mendelssohn, College, Svea Soner and Lyran choruses, under the direction of Prof. John R. Ortengren, sang "The Battle Hymn of the Republic." Speakers included: Mayor Jackson, Chairman Walter Van Alsyne of the Building and Grounds Committee, Hon. Judge Benson Wood and department commander of the G.A.R., Hon. Charles E. Fuller. There was a recitation by General Stibb and then the chorus sang "America."

The hall was the meeting place for many of the veterans groups. At first it was used by the G. L. Nevius post, No. 1, G.A.R., John R. Logan camp of the Sons of Union Veterans and Thomas G. Lawler post, No. 342, Veterans of Foreign Wars.

¹ Rockford City Directory, 1902, lists Eugene Ford as a carriage builder, and shows the addresses at 218 N. Wyman as well as 217 N. Main St. Rockford City Directory, 1903-04 shows Memorial Hall at 215 N. Main St. and 216 N. Wyman St. Eugene Ford has relocated his business to 120 N. Court St.

² Rockford Register-Star, June 3, 1993, 1B



The front page of the program for the dedication of Memorial Hall
Source: The Digital Past collection from the Rockford Public Library
Website at www.rockfordpubliclibrary.org

By 1939, the schedule of meetings included groups who met there from Monday through Saturday. In 1939 and 1940, there were discussions about tearing down the building and replacing it with a modern building to accommodate all the different groups. Harry Dannenberg was custodian of the hall at that time.



The Fife and Drum Corps, Sons of Union Veterans from the John A. Logan camp #26, on parade in front of Memorial Hall - from 1915. Source: The Digital Past collection from the Rockford Public Library Website at www.rockfordpubliclibrary.org

By 1950, 20 groups were using Memorial Hall. The main meeting rooms are the Post room on the first floor and the second-floor auditorium for large groups. There are four smaller rooms as well. By that year, C. A. Maxwell had been custodian for five years.

In July of 1953, the county board of supervisors voted to leave Memorial Hall at its present location and made plans for repairs. In 1955, C. B. Munson, chairman of the county building and grounds committee, said that repairs and painting had solved some of the problems. A leak in the hall roof had

been fixed, cornices and downspouts were repaired and the kitchen and dining room had been painted.

In 1960, the cost of renovating Memorial Hall was estimated at \$34,000, which would include fire escapes, to bring it up to code.

In 1964, LeRoy C. Reed, custodian, and his wife Sarah had cleaned, re-arranged and identified the 2,749 items housed in Memorial Hall. Most of the collection had been donated by Rev. G. R. Vanhorne, D.D., a member of Taylor's Battery of Chicago, Company B., 1st Regiment Light Artillery. The collection was dedicated to G. L. Nevius Post No.1, G.A.R.

In 1965, *Concrete Restorators* was awarded the contract to sandblast and clean the exterior of the Hall. Also that summer, the floors were sanded and the interior was painted.

In 1966 the Winnebago County Board spent \$30,000 for renovations and improvements.

Memorial Hall was placed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1976.

In 1978 Clem Burns was the curator (he was 71 at the time).

Memorial Hall is actually owned by the county. In 1982, the Rockford City Council was the keeper of the \$770,000 nest egg of the War Memorial Commission, which had grown from \$500,000 since 1980. William Siepp was the caretaker in 1982. By that time 23 groups were meeting in the hall. By 1983, the fund was up to about \$800,000.

In 1984, Memorial Hall received artifacts from the Vietnam War.

In 1988 Rockford aldermen approved an agreement whereby the city would spend about \$650,000 from the War Memorial fund to bring the building up to code. The county budgeted \$100,000 and had applied for a federal grant of \$12,500. The project wound up costing about \$1.5 million.

The City had also approved spending \$450,000 to raze the neighboring Blue Cross building and put in a parking lot and mini-monument in the parking lot.

Money from the City's War Memorial Fund, and interest money from a 1960 sales of a track of land was use for the renovation in 1989, said county planner David Noel. The architectural firm, Pedriana Gustafson Partnership., drafted the designs.

By 1990, the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau had an office in part of Memorial Hall.

During restoration in September 1991 it was discovered that there had been a mural on the ceiling of the auditorium. Later, it had been covered with paint. The original designs had been applied to canvas with water-soluble paint, but destroyed by moisture in the building and a leaky roof, reported Joe Zimmer, architect with Pedriana Gustafson Partnership. So that mural is lost to posterity.

On December 31, 1992, First Night included a renovated Memorial Hall, with the auditorium painted light camel beige with a slightly darker accent. Plaster work was in dark green with wall borders and ceiling patterns in navy blue, dark green, rose and tan with gold accents. The 32-pane skylight was restored. The horseshoe balcony with the original 238 fold-down wooden seats, which include wire racks underneath to hold men's hats were restored.

The Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau moved the week of June 17th 2004 to 321 W. State St. They had been in Memorial Hall 16 years.

The Winnebago County Board hired Terry Dyer in December 2004 to be the hall's part-time site manager and curator. Memorial Hall, 211 N. Main St., is now open Tuesdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Wednesdays from 4 p.m. to 8 p.m.; and Thursdays from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

The March 12, 2005 *Rockford Register-Star* reported that the military memorabilia was back in Memorial Hall. "There was a homecoming this week at Memorial Hall when about 2,700 military artifacts and war relics were returned to the facility from storage at Midway Village & Museum Center. It has been years since anyone has had a peek at these items. Winnebago County has been paying \$8,400 annually to store them at Midway Village. There had been nowhere at Memorial Hall to display them in recent years, as much of the space was being used by a paying tenant, the Rockford Area Convention and Visitors Bureau.

Also, in 2005, the "Raise the Flag" campaign to raise money for the Hall began June 1, 2005 and ran until November 11, 2005 (Veterans' Day).

OTHER SOURCES

Rockfordiana newspaper clippings files, Rockford Public Library
Newsbank database
Digital Past photo collection on Rockford Public Library website

THE HOME AND FAMILY OF LORENZO D. WALDO by Robert H. Borden

One of the houses recently razed to make way for re-routing Charles Street was the home of the Waldo family for many years. Lorenzo D. Waldo was born at Batavia, New York, October 2, 1819. He married Emily Richards while still living in New York. In 1846 they moved to Winnebago County, where they lived on a farm northwest of Rockford.

A daughter, Lucy, was born to Lorenzo and Emily on August 1, 1848, and two sons, Billings, born November 26, 1851, and Henry, born April 22, 1857, all while on the farm. Mrs. Waldo apparently died shortly after Henry's birth, or perhaps at childbirth, as on June 2, 1858, Lorenzo married Adelaide ("Ada") Beckett.

Lucy Waldo, the first child born to Lorenzo and his first wife Emily, was nine years old when her mother died. She was then sent to live with Emily's sister, Mrs. George Burden, at Dubuque, Iowa. Although she undoubtedly came occasionally to visit her family in Rockford, she continued to live in Dubuque until 1916. At the age of sixty-eight, she returned to Rockford to live with her remaining siblings in the family home. She never married, so she may have worked somewhere in Dubuque during those intervening years, but there is no record in Rockford of what she did. Lucy died March 21, 1930, in the family home in Rockford at the age of 82. Her funeral was held in the family home at 1204 Third Avenue in Rockford, but she was buried in Linwood Cemetery at Dubuque.

Billings Richards Waldo, the second child and older son of Lorenzo and Emily, was born November 26, 1851. Billings remained with his father and step mother until shortly after they moved to the Third Avenue home. He attended the East Side High School on South Fifth Street and was a pupil of Prof. Henry Freeman. After leaving school, Billings began working in the book store of his uncle, H. H. Waldo, and lived in a boarding house on the west side. He never again lived in the family home on Third Avenue. After working for his uncle for a few years, he went on the road as a salesman for the Rhoades and Utter Paper Mill. About 1875 Billings purchased the book business of James B. Howell on East State Street. In May of 1878 he married Miss Fanny Brown. They had no children, and Billings devoted his life to his wife, his business, and his church. However, for a short time in the

early 1880s he was an alderman from the First Ward. Billings Waldo died January 19, 1911.

The last child born to Emily Richards Waldo was the aforementioned Henry. Married to Lettie Douglass at Rockford in 1883, Henry was already on the road as a salesman for a Chicago wallpaper company, so he was usually gone from home. After their marriage, Henry and Lettie lived at various addresses, but after his sister Mabel died they moved into the family home at 1204 Third Avenue. Henry continued as a traveling salesman until about 1922, when he tried selling insurance for a year or so, as an agent for the Penn Mutual Life Insurance Company. From about 1924 to 1928 he was a janitor at Wight School where his younger half sister Ada was principal, then spent a year as janitor at the old Lincoln School before retiring about 1930. Henry and Lettie moved to Aurora in late 1937 to live with their son, Karl, who was superintendent of the Aurora public schools. Lettie died in Aurora about 1939 and Henry in 1941. They are buried at Greenwood Cemetery in Rockford.



The Waldo family home at 1204 3rd Ave. Photo courtesy of Bob Borden

About 1869, or perhaps earlier, the Waldo family moved into Rockford from the farm, and temporarily lived on East Street, which was later called Hall Street and is now known as North Sixth Street. Their address was 605 East Street, but the numbering was changed in 1894 throughout the city, so it is difficult to know which house was the Waldo home on East Street. Soon afterward they moved to the residence where they would live for many years. The address at that time was 1302 Third Avenue, but their house number was changed to 1204 in the year 1894, and that it remained until being razed in 2001.

Beginning about 1873 or 1874, Lorenzo Waldo was pastor of the Disciples Church, located where Trinity Lutheran Church was later built. Pastors of the Disciples denomination were often referred to as "Elder" instead of "Reverend". Mr. Waldo was highly regarded by his congregation and in the community. He continued as pastor of the Disciples congregation until 1886, when at the age of 67 he was suffering from brain cancer, making it impossible to continue. He died July 12, 1888, mourned by most of the city's population. His obituary in the Rockford Morning Star referred to him as one of nature's noblemen who had "left a legacy richer than gold can buy, brighter than stars of light.....The old know him as a friend and brother, the young will revere his memory as one whose loving heart and cheerful countenance and wise counsel has ever urged them to a better manhood. He practiced what he preached...."

Adelaide Beckett Waldo, Lorenzo's second wife, died January 7, 1906, at the age of 75. Born in Canada in 1831, she was 27 years old when she married 40-year-old Lorenzo. According to her obituary, she had been ill only a few days when she died, so it was somewhat of a shock to the family. She was a member of State Street Baptist Church, which she had probably joined after her husband had passed away. The Disciples congregation had built a new edifice on North First Street in 1889. By 1897 they had lost so many members that they could not continue to make payments on their mortgage. Trinity Lutheran Church, a new congregation, took over the payments and bought the building from the Disciples.

On June 28, 1862, while still on the farm, Adelaide Waldo gave birth to a daughter whom they named Jennie. After graduating from Rockford High School, Jennie attended Wellesley College. According to her obituary, she began teaching at Kishwaukee School in 1879. If that was correct, she must have completed high school by age 16 and then attended Wellesley for a year. She began teaching at Rockford High School in 1881 and continued until retiring in 1930. Graduates of Rockford High School who are now in their late eighties or older may remember having Miss Waldo as their science teacher. Jennie Waldo died June 23, 1951.

The youngest daughter of Lorenzo and Adalaide was Mabel, born August 18, 1870. After graduating from Rockford High School in 1889, she studied at Wellesley College and in Germany. She may have taught briefly in Rockford, as she was listed as a teacher in the 1892 city directory. In 1893 she accepted a position as teacher of German and English at Sterling High School. After she died, the Register-Gazette stated that she was an unusually enthusiastic instructor who inspired her students with a love for the languages. Although visiting her family regularly in Rockford she lived in Sterling until shortly before Christmas of 1906. Mabel then resigned because of illness and returned to Rockford to spend her remaining days with her sisters in the old home. She died there January 9, 1907, at the age of only 36, and was buried in the family plot at Greenwood Cemetery.

Although not the youngest of the Waldo children, Ada was the last to leave this life. She was born March 17, 1868, so only Mabel was younger. However, Ada lived to the age of 89. Like Jennie and Mabel, she was a graduate of Rockford High School, and never married, but unlike her sisters, Ada attended Northern Illinois Teachers College at DeKalb. She became a teacher in 1889 at Blake School, which stood at Chestnut and South Court Streets. About 1892 Ada transferred to the old Lincoln School on Park Avenue, and in 1896 she returned to Blake School as principal. Remaining as principal at Blake until the fall of 1904, she was then transferred to Wight School, replacing Mary Foote, who became principal of the new Jackson School.

As principal of Wight School, Ada was within walking distance of her work, and probably spent some time there even during summers. She retired in 1931, and continued living in the family home. She was a member of the Retired Teachers Club, the Nature Study Club, and the State Street Baptist Church. On November 22, 1957, Ada Waldo was brought to the old St. Anthony Hospital at 1401 East State Street, where she passed away on November 28. Her closest survivor was her nephew, Karl D. Waldo of Aurora, the son of her brother Henry.

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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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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.

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