
NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY – THE GRANGE
BURRITT GRANGE #1759 – THE TRASK BRIDGE PICNIC

By Don Milne



The Burritt Township Hall, formerly the Burritt Grange Hall
Photo courtesy of Don Milne

THE GOOD OLD SUMMERTIME
AND OLD CARRIAGE HOUSES IN ROCKFORD

By Sam Miller

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

The principle article in this issue is the story of the Burritt Grange and how they started the Trask Bridge Picnic, the largest one day farm picnic in the world. The Grange movement was an important part of agriculture in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Don Milne is a lifelong member of the Burritt Grange and is the Grange Master. He was also in charge of organizing the last Trask Bridge Picnic in 1965. Don's background puts him in a unique position to be able to tell the story of the Grange. Don is a retired sheriff's deputy and has been a long-time member of the Board of the Rockford Historical Society. He is also an antique car buff.

The other article is a story about growing up in Rockford in the 1930s by Sam Miller. Sam is a lifelong resident of Rockford and was my neighbor when I lived in the Edgewater Neighborhood. One of Sam's hobbies is finding and photographing old carriage houses in Rockford. Some of his photos appear in this issue of *Nuggets*.

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 987-5724 (day) or 986-4867 (evening).

Thomas Powers, Editor

HISTORY FAIR

The annual history fair will take place on January 16th, 2010 from 9-12 at Midway Village. We are looking for people to help judge the exhibits. If you haven't done this before you have missed a lot of fun. The participants are 7th and 8th grade students who have created a paper and exhibit around some aspect of local or regional history. Many of these exhibits are very creative and well done. I learn something new every year and it is an enjoyable experience. If you are interested in participating, call Gail Zahm at 779/537-9650 or Jean Lythgoe at 815/226-4542.

PATRONS OF HUSBANDRY – THE GRANGE

Burritt Grange #1759 – The Trask Bridge Picnic

By Don Milne

We have been gathering here at the Burritt Township Hall for the past several years in August to remember the Trask Bridge Picnic, which had been sponsored by the Burritt Grange. This year we are here not only to remember the picnic, but to recognize the 100th year of Burritt Grange #1759. In order to set the scene, we need a bit of history of the beginnings of the Grange.

Oliver Hudson Kelley was born in Boston in 1826 and at an early age, traveled to Minnesota, where he took up a homestead near Elk River, MN. He was elected to the Minnesota Legislature and worked part time on the staff of the newly created Department of Agriculture, in Washington, D.C., under the new commissioner, Isaac Newton. In 1866 he was sent to the southern states to evaluate farm conditions since the Civil War. There he found poverty, high prices, deplorable living conditions, buildings had been burned during the war and not rebuilt and land in terrible shape because of the battles fought in the fields, with remnants of the battles still littering the fields.

When Kelley returned to Washington, he contacted several friends with the idea of establishing a fraternal order just for farmers. They were John R. Thompson, an official with the Treasury Department; William Saunders, a landscape gardener; William Ireland, chief clerk in the Postal Department; Rev. Dr. John Trimble, Protestant Episcopal Church, head clerk in the Postal department; Rev. Aaron B. Gosh, Universalist minister, with the Agriculture Department; Francis M McDowell, banker and broker. All seven men were members of the Masonic Order.

Together they conceived the idea of a Fraternal Order for farmers, throughout the country. This would help heal the scars of the war and improve economics and the social position of the farm population. They named the new organization, "Patrons of Husbandry", with chapters to be formed, called Granges. As with other fraternal organizations, it had its ritual and secret meetings, both of which are greatly relaxed today. It was to be a family organization. Kelley's niece, Caroline Hall added to the organization by insisting that women should be a part of the group on an equal basis with men. Thus, there are four positions in the Grange that can only be held by women. Hall was the first Ceres. The word grange comes from early England, meaning the area where the house and out buildings are located on the farm.

Over the years, Patrons of Husbandry has been responsible for the passage of many laws relating to agriculture. The best known are the ones called Granger Cases or Granger Laws.

Five cases were decided by the Supreme Court of the United States in 1877. They held that within their borders, the states could regulate property affecting the public interest. These rulings led to the state regulations of many industries, railroads, store houses, telephone, electric companies and others.

Illinois seems to have started it with property which effects community at large, must submit to the control by the public for the common good.

In 1871-1873, Kelley toured the Midwest, organizing Granges. He was in Winnebago County during those time and organized as many as 25 - 30 granges locally, even several in the City of Rockford. A few are still going that were started at that time including Guilford Hope Grange #6, 1871; Union Grange #811, 1873; Harmony Grange #957, 1874 and Winnebago County Pomona Grange #73, 1874. Burritt Grange was started in 1873 but very little is known about it at that time, as there are no known Burritt records from that era. However we do know that it was active because in 1874 they sent two delegates to a two day meeting in Rockford, where Winnebago County Grange was organized. Burritt Grange, like many other granges at that time, became inactive in the late 1880s'. Mr. Kelley died in 1913 at the age of 87.

On October 28, 1909, a group of Burritt farmers decided to start Burritt Grange once again. And so with the help of the county Master, the State Master and other Grange Officials, Burritt Grange #1759 was formed and a Charter granted on January 1, 1910. From the minutes of the first meeting on October 28, 1909:

C.L. Wilcox was appointed chairman and George M. Davis Secretary. Then the following were elected, Master, C.L. Wilcox, Secretary, A. P. McDougall, and Lecturer, W. L. Potter. Name of Grange, Burritt, meeting adjourned. Next meeting in two weeks.

In its early years, Burritt grange met in members' homes or in the Modern Woodman Hall above the blacksmith Shop or in the hall above the Wempletown General Store or the Wempletown church. As Burritt Grange grew, it became apparent that they needed a hall of their own. In 1922 a building committee was formed consisting of Theodore Dickinson, Chairman, with George Chapman and H. E. Sarver. Their job was to find a location for the hall. After several dead-ends, a lady living in Wempletown, Mrs. Cora Roberts, offered the Grange an acre of ground near the Wempletown Church. A deal was made and the acre was purchased and plans were under way for building the Grange Hall.

At this time, late in 1923, news came to the committee that the Methodist Church building in Winnebago was for sale, as the Methodists had purchased the Congregational Church building. The Methodist Church building had been built in the 1860s. The building committee met with the Methodists and Burrirt Grange purchased the building. Now to get the building to Wempletown, seven miles away!

The Grange hired the Holcomb Bros. to oversee the taking down of the building and numbering each piece so it could be put back together. Soon, members were on the way to Winnebago with their horses and wagons, hauling the lumber to Wempletown. This was late in 1923. As winter approached, they changed to bob-sleds. Of course at this time very few farmers had cars, let alone trucks, so horse power did the trick. While this was going on, the basement was dug and the walls and floor were poured, ready to put the building back together. By early 1924 the building was taking shape and dedication plans were made for October 22, 1924. It was a big day, the program starting in the morning and lasting late into the evening. Grange officials from all around were present and Rev. John Gordon, Pastor of the Second Congregational Church of Rockford, gave the dedicatory speech. A chicken dinner was served from 5:30 until 11:00 and cost the whole sum of 50 cents. They cleared \$299.00 (Over 600 people were served).

There have been several changes to the hall over the years. On Nov. 11th 1948, a fire started in the furnace room and spread to the upper floors of the hall before it was brought under control by the fire Department. Of course it was rebuilt. In 1955, a room was added to the south end of the building and a large room was created downstairs for recreational purposes. The stage was also moved, making the main hall area larger.

After the end of the Trask Bridge Picnic in 1965, membership dropped, either by members moving away or by old age. It soon became apparent that the grange could not afford the upkeep on the hall. In 1977, an offer to purchase the Hall was made by Burrirt Township and after much discussion by Grange members; it was decided to accept the offer from the Township. A deal was made agreeing to the use of the hall by Burrirt Grange for two monthly meetings and a room being reserved for use and storage of Grange property, as long as Burrirt Grange held its charter.

No story of Burrirt Grange would be complete without a chapter about the Trask Bridge Picnic. Over the years many picnics had been held in Andrews Grove, school picnics, church picnics, reunions and others, all limited of course to the sponsoring group. Then in the spring of 1910, four local farmers, Walter Potter, Walter Livingston, Elmer Scott and Everett Davis, decided that there should be a Harvest Picnic in the fall, for the surrounding area. Scott donated the use of his farm on Cemetery Road for the location and plans were underway. They planned games, entertainment, exhibits and speeches. Games were for the kids and ball games for adults.

They also contacted machinery dealers to show some of their new machines, and several other stores to show their goods. They even planned to cook a few hot dogs for any one that didn't bring their lunch. They hoped that at least 150 to 200 people might show up for the day.

The day dawned with the sun shining bright and horses and buggies, wagons and a few new fangled horseless carriages began to arrive. Soon the area was crowded with an estimate of more than 1500 to 2000 people milling around having a good time. When the day ended our four friends knew that they could not have a repeat performance next year. They of course belonged to the Burritt Grange and Walter Potter, later known as "Picnic Potter", suggested that they take it up with the Grange to see if the Grange would host the picnic in 1911. At the next meeting it was brought up and the Grange decided to go with it. Thus was born the Trask Bridge Picnic! Mr. Andrew offered Andrew's Grove as the location and all was ready to go. But now, what would we call the picnic?

In the early 1830s, the Trask brothers, Alva and Elias, built a ferry to cross the Pecatonica River, as this was on the way from Chicago to the lead mines at Galena and Mineral Point. Later, when the first bridge was built, the Trask brothers were put in charge and it was named "Trask's Bridge", after the Trask brothers, so the road going to the bridge was called "Trask's Bridge Road". What better name then, than the Trask Bridge Picnic, the Largest One Day Farm Picnic in the World!

There is one four letter word that is never used by those knowing the Trask Bridge Picnic, "RAIN". There were five years that the picnic was not held. In 1932, Trask Bridge Road was being rebuilt and so it was not possible to get to the picnic grounds or even to the hall. During 1942 - 1945, no picnics were held because of rationing, food stamps and patriotism.

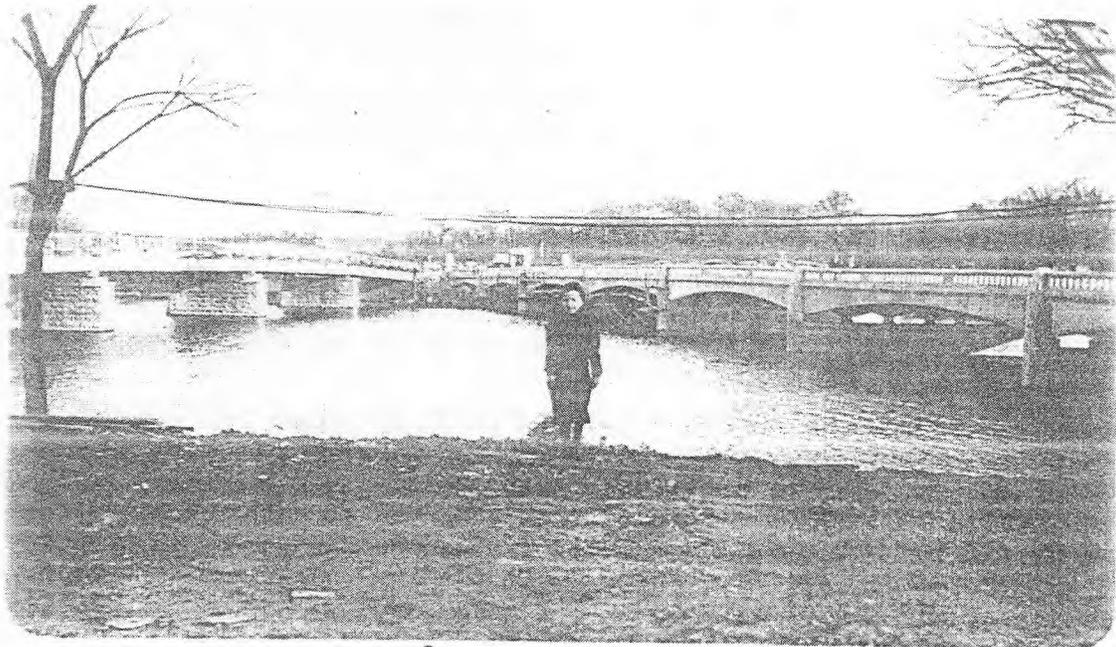
August 29, 1928, rain started to fall at noon and lasted the rest of the day. The grounds were flooded and the picnic was called off. However the rains stopped, the sun shown brightly the next morning and the picnic was opened for the second day, the only time it was ever held for two days. Actually a walking bridge was built by C. B. Williamson, sometime in the early morning so that people could walk across the ponds! In 1951, the rain came early in the month and seemed that it would never stop. The picnic grounds were a lake. The Winnebago County Fair Board offered their grounds to the Grange and the picnic was held in Pecatonica. In August 1958, the rains started late Tuesday night. The picnics were held on Wednesdays and the grounds were again flooded. The General Committee met early Wednesday morning and called the picnic off. The Sheriff was present and noted that all the tents were full of merchandise, machinery in place and many, many dollars worth of equipment was on the grounds. The Sheriff also had a big display tent with a radio set up contacting the Sheriff's Office and patrol cars. He turned to me and said "you will be assigned here until the picnic can be held". Fifteen days later the picnic was held and I had

lived at the Trask Bridge Picnic for the 15 days. I really didn't know if I ever wanted to hear about the Trask Bridge Picnic again! The last Trask Bridge Picnic was held August 4, 1965.

And so the Trask Bridge is but a memory. We thank those that worked so hard to make it a success. We honor Burritt Grange for its service to the community and the hard working members that brought it through bad times and good times. We wish we could name all of these people, but that would not be possible, so our thanks to all of them. I would like to think back to that first meeting on the 28th of October, 1909. I would like to quote from a letter, written by a charter member in 1953 - "I well remember the first meeting on a chilly night, held upstairs in the old Stone Blacksmith Shop. The stairs were outside, wobbly and the weather was windy, but the 40 enthusiasts made the climb and we were duly installed".

We thank the Burritt Township History Museum Board for revisiting the Trask Bridge Picnic and the memories that we all have of the past. Also their support of Burritt Grange, and the important part both played in the history of Burritt Township.

Don Milne is Master of Burritt Grange # 1759.



Sept. 1937.

This photograph shows a young Paula Hayward standing between the two Auburn St bridges. To the left is the old Auburn St High bridge, built in 1900. To the right is the new (and current) Auburn St bridge which was built before the old one was torn down. Photo courtesy of Paula Hayward.

THE GOOD 'OLD' SUMMERTIME

By Sam Miller

Let me set the scene; it was a warm afternoon in the summer of 1935, my Dad had made a small fishpond in the backyard of our house on Douglas Street, my friend Chuck, from across the street, and I were lying flat-out at the edge of the pond trying to grab the goldfish.

"Sam", I heard my mother call. I could see her feet below the sheets hanging on the clothesline; and, as she couldn't see me, I decided to wait a minute to see what she wanted before I answered. She called again, "Sam, I want you to go to the store for me."

I was one of the lucky kids with a grocery store at each end of our block. At the north end was Ellis Avenue Grocery, known as Howie's and at the south end on Auburn was Dryhurst's. It wasn't like going to the A & P; the neighborhood grocery stores were for necessities like bread and milk – or pipe tobacco for Dad – "Do you have Prince Albert in the can?" "Yes, we do." "Well, you better let him out!" Mom didn't have to tell me which store to go to. I knew by what she wanted, the stores were similar but stocked with different brands or items.

Going to the store was never a chore, as there was always the possibility of getting all or part of the change for candy; stuff like jawbreakers, bubble gum, wax lips, or licorice whips. Major purchases such as an Eskimo Pie, a Popsicle or a candy bar had to be negotiated, but penny candy wasn't too hard to come by.

There were guys, although I never did it, who would go behind the store and steal empty milk bottles out of the crate waiting to be returned to the dairy, trot around into the store – pop it up on the counter and trade it for 5 cents worth of candy. Why Howie never figured that one out I'll never know.

Out in front of Howie's was our meeting place, to decide the activities of the day – or the moment. It was also where any kid with any money was going to show up. Maybe he had a nickel for a HiFlier kite, and we would be off to the Bumps. It was the perfect place for launching anything from a box-kite capable of lifting a cat aloft (I saw it once), to tiny 6 inch cellophane kites that "disappeared" at about 50 feet.

The "Bumps" was a big field that ran from behind the houses on Auburn north to Ellis Avenue; and from Logan Street, across from St. Mary's Cemetery, back to the alley. By the way, the Bumps got its name from a series of low mounds that ran diagonally across the field. They were fun on a bike, and were used as trenches for playing war; in which we fired slices of automobiles inner tubes at each other with our homemade 'rubber' guns.

Or maybe some kid would show up with a roll of friction tape to keep the sawdust inside our baseball for one more game, and we'd run off to the "Ball Diamond", located on the northeast corner of Auburn and Melrose Streets. Three lots wide and back to the alley. One unforgettable event took place during a game there - I was hit by a baseball, which broke my nose. I ran home crying. This was in the days before E.R. Well, not exactly - there was always "**E**lsie's **R**emedy". My mother went to the icebox, got some ice chips, wrapped them in a washcloth, and told me to hold it on my nose. She gave me a lollipop and said, "There, there, you'll be all right." For those of you who have wondered where I got my strange looking honker, now you know.

In that summer, "flagpole sitting" was the in thing. So Howie cajoled, coerced, paid, (I didn't know and I still don't) two high school boys to sit in the Poplar tree in front of the store for an attempt at the local record - and as an advertising gimmick. I had to go home when the street lights came on, so I don't know if they actually spent their nights up in the tree, and for a long time I wondered what they did when nature called.

Dryhurst's Grocery served as a backdrop for another one of our favorite pastimes. Car identification. Some days we might get a few Chevys and Fords, a Whippet, a Moon, and a Packard. It would take us a couple of hours. I don't mean that's all the different makes we were able to identify - I mean that's all the traffic there was.

In the fall we would go across Auburn Street to the Hulin Park Pumping Station triangle and punt footballs at the huge letter "H" set in bricks on the back wall of the building.

Three things stand out in my memory from the days at Howie's; one was when Duke bit the handle off a baseball bat on a dare, and the other two were when Iggy sneaked up behind Valerie and untied her halter top.

Today I stand out in our backyard on Cumberland Street (that's right, in the past 70 plus years I've come two blocks) and look at the Locust tree I planted 45 years ago. It is now 50 feet high with a spread of 60 feet. It was about four feet tall when I planted it, and Janie, the five year-old who lived next door said, "Are you planting that tree or burying it?"

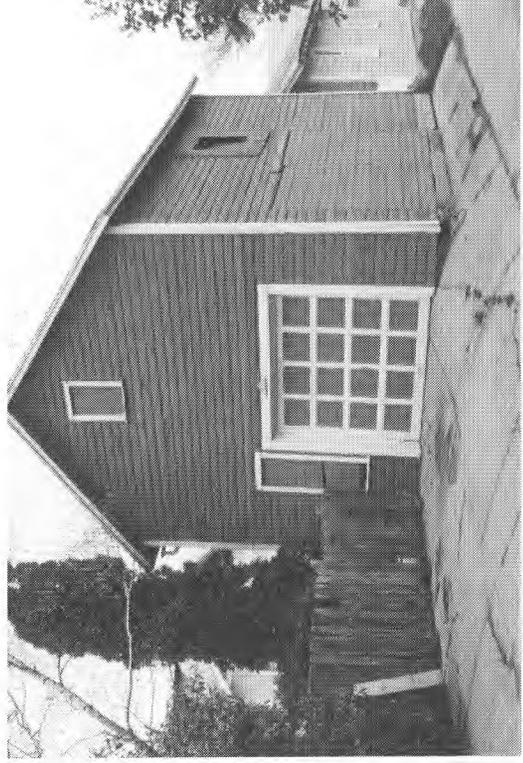
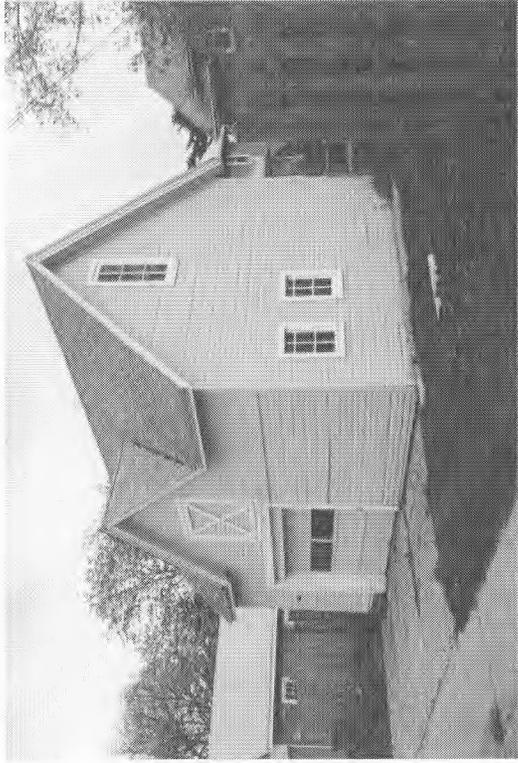
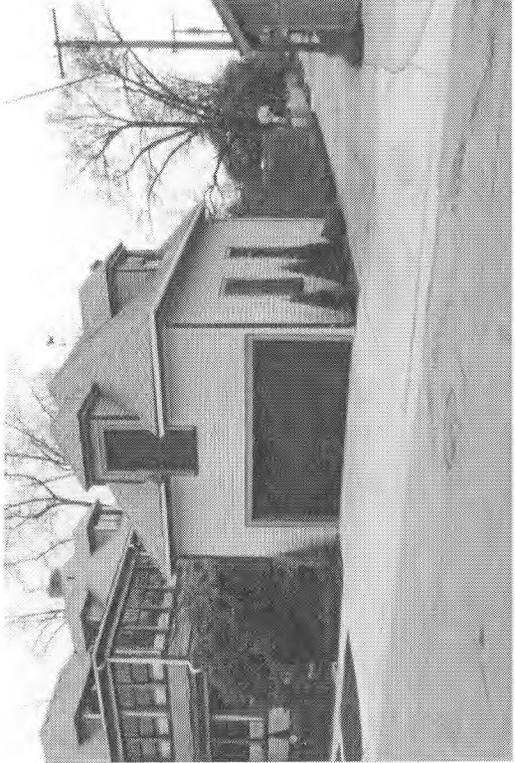
The events in this narrative, while growing up on Douglas Street, are true to the best of my memory. But time marches on. Edgewater Neighborhood, we called it "The North End" back then, was and still is a great place to live.

CARRIAGE HOUSES IN ROCKFORD

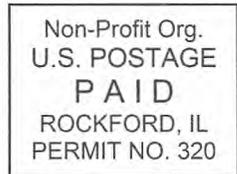
Photos by Sam Miller

A Carriage house was the predecessor to the garage. Before people had cars they needed a place to keep their horses and carriages. Many of these old carriage houses survive in the older sections of Rockford, having been converted to garages. Sam Miller has collected photos of many of these, mostly in his North End neighborhood. Here are some examples.





ROCKFORD HISTORICAL SOCIETY
6799 Guilford Rd.
Rockford, IL 61107



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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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