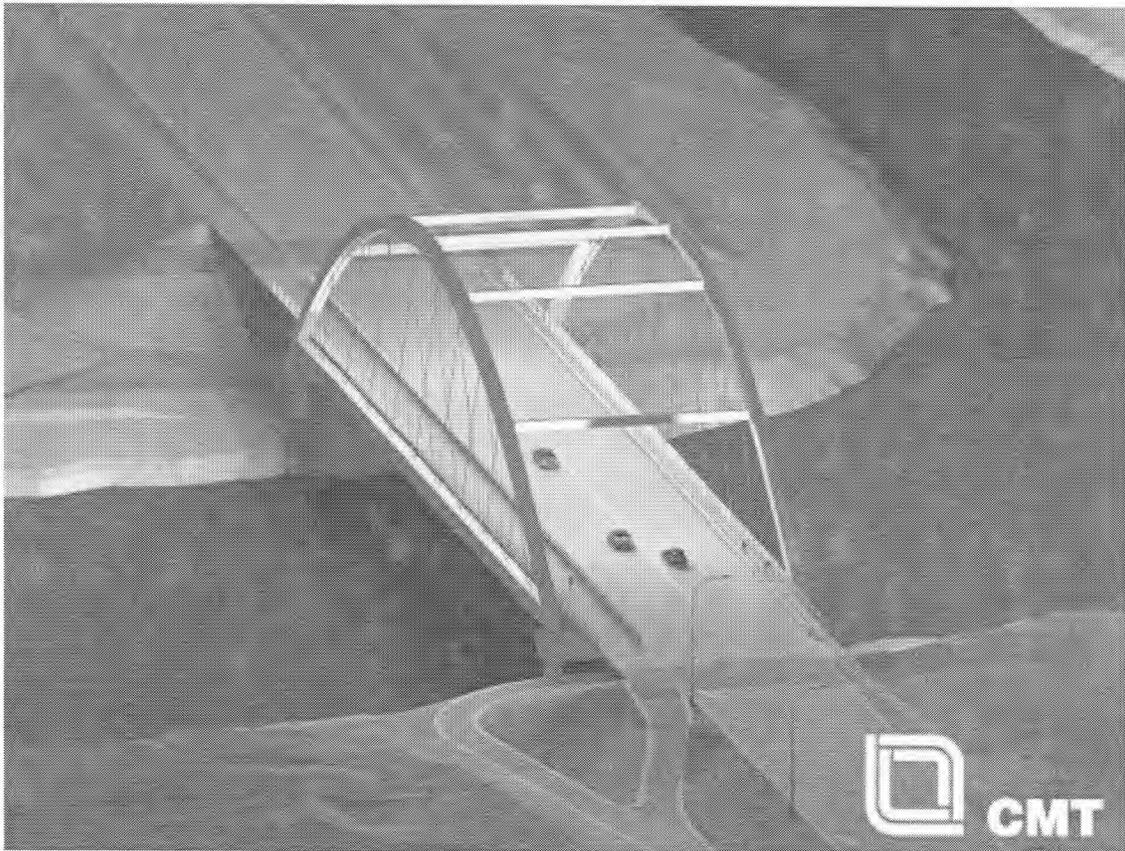

NUGGETS OF HISTORY

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THE MORGAN ST BRIDGE – PAST AND PRESENT

By Jean Lythgoe



An architectural rendering of the new Morgan St Bridge as shown at night. Created by the firm of Crawford, Murphy & Tilly, Inc. Courtesy of the City of Rockford.

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue presents an article about the history of the Morgan St Bridge. In addition to telling the story of how the bridge was built and rebuilt, it also tells the story of how the bridge got its name, from the Morgan family, one of the earliest settlers in Rockford. The present bridge is almost 100 years old and will be torn down and replaced in the next few years so it is appropriate that we address its history while it is still here. The picture on the front cover shows the design of the new bridge that will begin construction in 2012.

The article was written by Jean Lythgoe. Jean is in her second term as President of the Rockford Historical Society. She has been a Librarian Assistant in the Adult Services Dept. of the Rockford Public Library for many years and is in charge of the Local History Room.

On the back page of this issue you will find a photograph of several men who worked in the Isaacson Iron Works, Inc. in 1948. This photo was sent to us by an anonymous donor. While the names were on the back and Jean was able to do some research on the company we would like to know more. If anyone knows more about this company or anyone in the photograph please contact me at the phone number below or at my e-mail address powersthomasa@gmail.com.

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 815/986-4867 or 815/987-5724.

Thomas Powers, Editor

THE MORGAN STREET BRIDGE – PAST AND PRESENT

By Jean Lythgoe

The original Morgan Street Bridge was built in 1890. It has been replaced and rebuilt before, but today, 120 years later, the City of Rockford is making plans to replace the bridge, parts of which have stood since 1916. This article tells the story of the bridge and the man it was named for.

The Morgan Family

Abiram Morgan and his wife Mary were two of the earliest settlers in Rockford. Mr. Morgan, born circa 1779, and his wife Mary, born circa 1790, were both from Massachusetts. They left in September 1836 on a visit west. They saw and liked the Rock River valley, and decided to settle here. Mr. Morgan purchased a quarter section (160 acres) from Nathaniel Loomis, and built a small log house. It is "*on almost the exact site of the spacious old Horsman mansion.*" This was on the block bounded by Mulberry, N. Winnebago, Peach and Court Streets. (*Rowland p.309*). Mr. Morgan also purchased section 22, which was originally an "Indian float." (*Kett 1877 p.645*). "Mr. Morgan possessed a competence, which became the basis of a large estate for his family." (*Kett 1877 p.645*). He was a Baptist.

After their house was built, they wanted their only child, a daughter named Frances and her husband to come and join them in the house. When Frances was a young school girl attending Charleston seminary, she met Charles I. Horsman, a young business man in Boston. It is said that it was mutual love at first sight, and they were married Feb. 10, 1834, when Frances was nineteen. So Charles and Frances Horseman came to Rockford. Mrs. Horsman tells the story of their arrival in Rockford. It is December 2, 1836 and night is falling when they reach the east side of the Rock River. They were "cold, hungry, weary and disheartened." The river was full of floating ice and there was no ferry available. However, there was a man willing to row them across in a small boat. She continues the story: "Then they walk up from the river arm in arm, through the stately oaks, until they came to the home...Mrs. Horsman said that as the door was thrown open to welcome the daughter and her husband, when the flood of light threw out its rays into the night, and the aroma of hot coffee greeted their keen senses, it seemed as if the gates of Paradise had been opened to them." On this very site Mrs. Horsman resided until her death in 1889. Mr. Horsman died March 2, 1875. (*Kett 1877 p.645-6*). Frances Horsman died 15 December 1889. Her will was filed 20 December 1889.

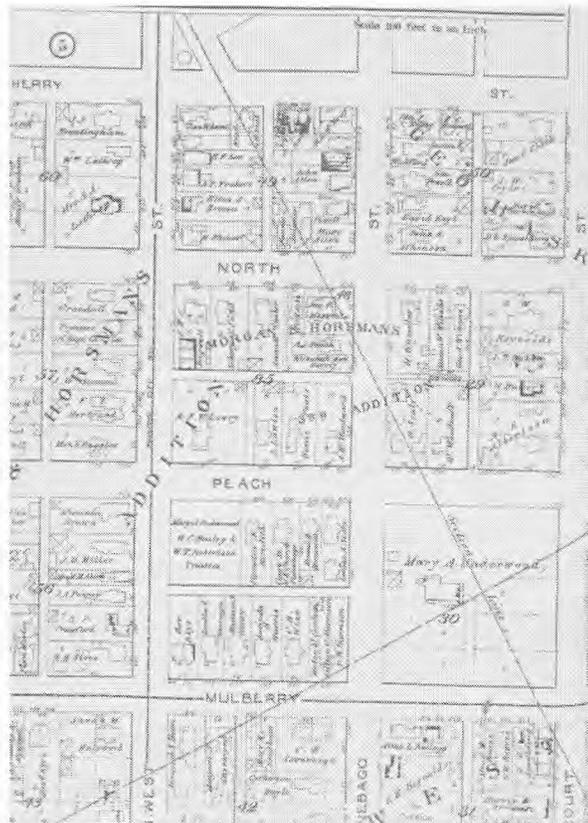
Their only child, Frances Horsman, and her family and her parents the Morgans all lived together as long as the parents lived." (*Rowland p.309*).

In the 1850 census, Charles I. Horseman is listed as a merchant, worth \$20,000. Also listed are his wife Frances A, and two daughters, Arabella C.

and Mary A. Horsman. Abiram and Mary Morgan are listed as well, with Mr. Morgan's worth also \$20,000.

Abiram Morgan died at age 75, on January 1, 1855.

In the 1860 census, Charles I. Horsman is listed as a farmer, with real estate valued at \$100,000 and a personal estate of \$20,000.



The 1892 Atlas shows Block 30 as owned by Mary A. (Horsman) Underwood. There is one large house on the west side of the block almost in the middle with a stable and one other outbuilding on the property. According to the 1892 city directory, the address was 204 N. Church St.

The family is buried in Greenwood cemetery, in Section No. 10, Lot. No 2. Charles I. Horsman purchased the lot Dec. 8, 1857.

The first person buried there in grave 1 was Edward M. Horseman, 5 weeks, 12/25/1843

Grave 2: Bell Cheny Horsman 8 years 9/15/1845

Grave 3: Abiram Morgan 75 years, 1/6/1855

Grave 4: Fannie Horsman 3 mo 9/15/1858

Grave 5: Arabella C. Ogden 20 years 9/14/1866

Grave 6: Mary Morgan 82 years 6/28/1874 (next to Abiram)

Grave 7: Charles I. Horsman 62 years 12/15/1889
Grave 8: Frances A. Horsman 75 years 12/15/1889 (next to Charles)
Grave 9: Dr. Milton David Ogden, 59yr (5/12/1898)
Grave 10: Mary Horsman Underwood (ashes) 76 years 12/30/1924
Grave 11: John Curtis Underwood (ashes) 75 years 6/30/1949
Grave 12: Arabella McKee 92 years 6/12/1959

The Bridge

In 1889, Rockford, with a population of 25,000, has only the State street Bridge to connect the east and west sides of the city. It was time for another bridge. But where would it be? Cedar Street, on the west side, was near the water power district and would make a convenient choice for the factory workers who lived on the east side and worked on the west side. However, east side businessman Samuel W. Treat noted that there was no street on the east side of the river opposite Cedar Street. If land needed to be purchased for a bridge at that location, it would drive up the cost of a bridge. (*Rockford Register, Dec. 7, 1889 as cited in Molyneaux*).

Sylvester Scott, "respected as a polite, gentleman worth listening to," a market gardener known as the "Garden Poet" was quoted as follows;

"What it [a new bridge] needs is to be part of a completed circuit. Get it in a circuit and it will get there. I'm a poor man. I've got ten acres of land and it's mortgaged, but I'll give \$10 with any other thousand men to build a bridge at Morgan Street....I have driven around this city for forty years and in time I have been compelled to go out of my way enough to travel around the world twice. Build a bridge, gentlemen, and build it at once." Molyneaux, p.11

John Molyneaux quotes the *Register* of the following year on Jan 6, 1890. "The united action taken by the property owners in South Rockford for a bridge at Morgan Street has caused that site to be favorably regarded."

That night was the first City Council for the new year. The special bridge committee presented the final report. They recommended a "combination deck bridge of wood and iron or steel be built as soon as weather permitted between Morgan Street and Bluff Street. This bridge would have a roadway of 22 feet, two sidewalks 8 feet wide, piers and abutments of masonry, and approaches of wood." [p12] The committee also recommended a new bridge at State Street to be begun as soon as the Morgan Street bridge was ready, which would be one-third less to build than one at Cedar Street. Last, the committee recommended that the then-current State Street Bridge be kept and "used elsewhere on the river wherever the necessary piers and abutments can be provided." City Council discussion followed, and Committee member Edward Brown (2nd ward) replied that the report presented what the city could afford at the time. The resulting vote was that the council approved the report. Alderman Jeremiah Davis (1st ward) voted

no, and T. J. Derwent (3rd ward) abstained. *Molyneaux, p.13.*

A letter from south Rockford citizens was read, in which a group of Rockford businessmen "guaranteed that the city would be able to acquire any right of way necessary for the bridge, and that no damage would be allowed property owners because of the construction of the necessary embankments or viaducts. Signers included Alderman Harbison, Robert Tinker, former mayor, and retired business man Frank B. Trahern (and father of 4th ward alderman O. P. Trahern.) *Molyneaux, p.14*

The trustees at Rockford Female Seminary (later Rockford College) did not want the Morgan Street Bridge, because it would have connected with Bluff Street (now College Ave) which was on the south side of the seminary's property.

In March, the council accepted a bid for the construction of the piers for the Morgan Street Bridge and the work began. On June 11, there was a flash flood on the Kent creek, which slowed work. The bridge received the full impact of the flood. A caisson and the false work for the bridge were destroyed, with equipment and lumber washed away. The derrick was swept four miles downriver.

The *Rockford Register Star* of July 1, 1948 had an article, "He's Here at 89 to Explain How 1890 Bridge Was Built" Charles F. Shedd was a superintendent for the subcontractor, Colbert Avery, for all three bridges built in 1890. After the June 13 [sic], 1890 flash flood down the Kent Creek, the false work for the Morgan Street Bridge was washed away. Shedd volunteered to conduct salvage operations at Byron and Oregon. He and his crew built rafts and shipped seven [railroad] carloads of lumber back to Rockford, saving the contractors many thousands of dollars. This took about two weeks.

1890 was a very eventful year for bridges in Rockford. The bridge was finally ready for public use on Wednesday, Sept. 24, 1890. In the 1890 Rockford City Council Annual Report, p.121 gives the Annual Report Special Bridge Committee:

Expenditures Morgan Street bridge \$26,873.43
Unpaid contract Morgan Street bridge \$250.00

On p.122 "...locating the new bridge at Morgan Street, citizens of South Rockford paying for the right-of-way and land damages. Plans were drawn, bids were called for and contracts were let on very favorable terms for the city." This same year a new bridge was built at State Street, the old State Street Bridge was floated downriver to be the middle (Chestnut Street) bridge, and the flood of June 11 swept away the following bridges: Cedar, Elm, State, Mulberry, School and Auburn. They were all iron bridges except for the Auburn Street Bridge. The report indicated that the State Street Bridge over the Kent could be repaired, but the rest would need to be

replaced. [An item not in the original budget.] and on p.139 of the Mayor's Message: "...the old material should be sold for the best terms we can get."

In the 1891 Annual Report of the City of Rockford is the Outgoing Mayor's Address, by John H. Sheratt. Two-year terms were the norm then, and he summarized what had been done in those two years, remembering that one of the most important things that the voters wanted were more bridges. The State Street Bridge had been replaced at a cost of \$56,616, the Morgan Street Bridge had been built at a cost of \$26,990, and the cost of replacing the bridges on the Kent Creek which had been destroyed by the flood on June 11th was about \$15,000. Other expenses for the Morgan Street Bridge included \$8.77 for lumber, \$88.47 for inspection, and \$75.44 for painting.

By 1916, it was time to replace the 1890 Morgan Street Bridge. The contract went to J. J. O'Heron & Company, of Chicago. The bid was \$83,433. The bridge was to be built of the open spandrel type with eight arches. It was built of reinforced concrete and no part of the old bridge was used. It was 975 feet long, with about 7,500 barrels of cement, 5,000 yards of gravel and 175-180 tons of steel reinforcements in it. *Rockford Republic* 1-28-1916

1960 Replacement Bridge

The *Rockford Register Republic* reported on Nov. 28, 1958 that Public Works Commissioner T. F. (Ted) Johnson was looking to find a company to draft recommendations for repair of the Morgan Street Bridge. It would need to carry three lanes of traffic instead of the two at the time. Engineers had drilled into the arches of the [then] 40-year-old bridge. They reported that the arches were steel covered in concrete, and that the steel was in good condition. The report recommended that the [then] present deck and supports be cleared away down to the arches and piers, and that the arches be reinforced by covering them with another layer of concrete. The arches would then be strong enough to support a 39-foot wide road, instead of the [then] 28. The sidewalk width should be 4.5 ft.

In the February 12, 1959 *Rockford Morning Star*, Alfred Benesch and Associates, bridge design engineers out of Chicago, concluded that the Morgan Street bridge could carry traffic for 50 years if the city spent \$641,000. On January 19, 1960, the *Register Republic* reported that Shappert Engineering Company of Belvidere had the low bid of \$615,036. In 1957, voters had approved a bridge repair bond issue and set the cost of the Morgan Street Bridge job at a maximum of \$641,000. On January 27, it reported, "City to Close Morgan St. Bridge Feb.1."

On March 2, 1960, the headline from the *Register Republic* was "Concrete in Bridge Rotten, Crumbling." One major cross-beam under the bridge near the west end disintegrated when demolition crews first touched it with a gigantic jackhammer, and portions of the sidewalks...were in such bad shape that workmen could thrust a crowbar through the concrete. It was stated that

"Possibly the concrete mix for the beam back in 1916 contained dirty gravel." The article went on to state that all new concrete would contain an additive that would help protect it against the corrosive action of salt. An experienced man from Benesch's Chicago office was to check every local batch of concrete used in the construction. Carey Cottingham, the resident engineer from Benesch stated that about one third of the bridge at the west end had been taken down, and a 'tramway,' a wooden bridge was nearly complete on the north side of the bridge. The tramway would carry the heavy crane which was used for continuing the demolition and then later for pouring concrete.



The Morgan Street Bridge that was erected in 1916. This view from the southeast shows the outline of the Water Power industries in the distance. Source: Rockford, An Illustrated History by Jon W. Lundin. Photo courtesy of the Rockford Museum Center.

There were 32 pourings of concrete, which had to be staggered. There was a two-month work stoppage over the summer, and Shappert had promised to finish the job before the Christmas holidays.

Carey Cottingham was quoted in the *Rockford Morning Star* on Oct. 16, 1960, that the \$622,000 bridge was "one of the best in this area."

The *Rockford Morning Star* on November 19, 1960, reported "Open Morgan Bridge Today." The new rebuilt bridge included three lanes, two east-bound and one west-bound. The cost came in at \$622,000, which was under budget and a month earlier than Shappert's goal. "As late as Friday, paint crews were applying the last coat of aluminum paint to the hand rail" The 3 p.m. parade scheduled for that day began at S 2nd and Oak, with a ribbon-cutting at the east end of the bridge. At S. Main and Morgan Streets, the marching bands were to give demonstrations: Washington Junior High School Band, the Phantom Drum and Bugle Corp and the Purple Knights were the marching units.

Now it is 2010, and the 1960 Morgan Street Bridge has indeed carried traffic for 50 years, as concluded by the bridge designers of that 1960 bridge. A new bridge is in the works, with construction to begin in 2011 and finish by 2014. The project is expected to cost \$34 million.

Several of the old factory buildings are coming down. The crushed concrete from the old Barron Industries building will be used as filler, as will be crushed stone from the Eclipse Building. It is likely that other buildings will be reused in the same way.

"This bridge was an innovative design in its day, and we wanted to replace it with something equally as innovative," said City Engineer Jon Hollander. "Unless you came down here, you'd never know these arches were here. So, we're going to put our arch on the top." "Morgan Street Bridge – Reusing Rubble – New span will recycle demolished buildings" *Rockford Register Star*, April 1, 2010, p.1D, 7D

The space underneath the road on the west of the bridge will also be filled in. Hollander said that will give addition support, and allow the city to build a shorter bridge. The fill will be covered with dirt and grass, providing green space on either side of the west bank of the river.

The city expects to save \$200,000 by crushing the buildings on site, not having to remove and dispose of the building debris, and another \$200,000 by not having to buy filler.



The Morgan St. Bridge as it appears today looking to the east. The building with the cupola is one of the original Rockford College buildings. Photo courtesy of Mary Lythgoe.

Sources:

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Rendering of new Morgan Street Bridge: Courtesy of Crawford, Murphy & Tilly Inc., permission of City Hall

Photograph of the Morgan Street Bridge taken December 2, 2010: Courtesy Mary Lythgoe



On May 28, 1948 (?) the Rockford supervisors group took part in the Safety Manual presentation. In the group are, left to right, seated: Herbert Wickstrand, Fred Corbett, Earl Krahenbuhl, Carl Batchelor, George Knutson and Clarence Backman. Left to right, standing: Reynold Anderson, Clifford Holland, Tom White, Leonard Johnson, Robert Lindberg, Carl Peterson, and Hugo L Johnson.

The Rockford Historical Society would like to thank the anonymous donor who sent us the photograph of the men of the tractor manufacturing department of Isaacson Iron Works Inc. The company is listed in the Rockford city directory from 1947 through 1950, and in 1951, the entry is for the Pullman-Standard Car Manufacturing Co. The *Rockford Morning Star*, June 16, 1946, article "New factory to employ 600" stated that the Isaacson Iron Works of Seattle, Washington, was buying the building at 2524 11th St. It had been built in 1942 by the defense plant corporation (government) for \$1,500,000 and operated by Sundstrand Machine Tool company during the war. Isaacson bought it for \$36,000. The building was 55,000 square feet on 2.15 acres of land. Isaacson produced a complete line of earth moving tractor equipment at the plant. An article from the *Rockford Morning Star* of December 21, 1950 indicated that "Pullman buys Isaacson Iron Factory Here." The Pullman Company planned that all of the 175 Rockford employees would continue at the plant. In 1955 the building was purchased by Goss Printing Press Company.

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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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