
NUGGETS OF HISTORY

VOLUME 52 MARCH 2014 NUMBER 1

THE ROWLEYS – ON THE HILL SINCE 1845

By John D. Rowley

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This advertisement for the first phase of Rainbow Ridge subdivision appeared in the Rockford Daily Republic on Sept. 25, 1925.

EXCERPTS FROM LOOKING DOWN MEMORY LANE

By Clara Retzlaff Danielson

FROM THE EDITOR'S DESK

This issue contains two articles. The first is a short history of the Rowley family, early settlers in Winnebago County, and the Rainbow Ridge subdivision that they founded in the 1920s. John Rowley is a first time contributor to the *Nuggets of History*. He is a retired teacher who has lived most of his life in the Winnebago/Seward area. He is a member of the Seward Historical Society and the Friends of the Winnebago Public Library. He is also the volunteer township historian for Winnebago Township. John is part of a small group of people who have been putting together the "We Remember – People of our past" series of booklets about our early settlers. He also has a strong interest in genealogy. He and his wife Alice have five grown children.

The second article is an excerpt from Clara Retzlaff Danielson's booklet, *Looking Down Memory Lane*. This booklet was originally written by Clara when she was in her 90s and tells the story of what it was like growing up on a farm in rural Winnebago County in the early part of the 20th century. We had originally published part of her story in 2007 and this is another excerpt. Reprinted with permission.

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

Thomas Powers, Editor

ROWLEYS – ON THE HILL SINCE 1845

By John D Rowley

Isaac Hamilton Rowley (born June 25, 1818) arrived in Winnebago County from Monroe County (near Rochester), NY, in 1841 with two companions, Hamilton Barross and Philander Gates. Together they bought a plot of ground on the north side of 14th Ave. They got it under cultivation and then sold it, each then having the money to buy their own farms in Guilford Township.

On October 31, 1843, Isaac and Harriet Amanda Munro (born June 5, 1824), who had arrived in Winnebago County from Troy, NY, in 1838 at age 14, were married. Her parents, Levi P.H. and Esther Harriet (Carmichael) Munro, and her uncle John P. Carmichael bought farms from the government at the northeast corner of New Milford Township (west from the corner of Harrison and 20th St. today). Harriet had taught school for several years and in the 1880s wrote an account of the trip from NY to IL.

The couple moved on January 4, 1845, onto 120 acres in Section 31 at present day Broadway and 25th St. It was sold by the Bezaleel Corwin family who moved to the Durand area. Since they had a debt to storekeeper Luke Joslin, Isaac traveled to California in 1850. In Hangtown, (now known as Placerville) he invested in a boarding house and a sawmill. He returned to Rockford via Panama in 1852, arriving in the city from the east on the first train to arrive on the new Chicago and Galena Union Railroad in August. They paid off the debt and eventually owned 160 acres stretching south from Broadway to Harrison Ave. Because of debt remaining when Isaac dies (November 30, 1892), the family farm shrank to 80 acres in the next generation, when youngest son Harry Hamilton, born May 13, 1860, took over farming. Harriet inherited a part of the Munro farm in the 1870s. She lived until the spring of 1911. They are buried in the Starkey-Union Cemetery at the corner of Harrison and Alpine.

The other Rowley sons were Walter Ward (born 1844), a Civil War veteran; Edwin R, a west side street sprinkler and prominent Mason; and Milton C. (born 1853), a house painter.

Harry was married on November 15, 1882 to Sarah F. James, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. William James of New Milford. (He farmed in spite of hay fever that landed him in bed whenever the barn had to be filled with fodder. One of the Rowley barns itself was a Rockford local history landmark, since it was built in the

1830s by Daniel Haight, the first east side settler, for use as a livery stable. The first Methodist services in the community were held in that building, which was later taken down and reassembled on the Rowley property (see Thurston's history of Rockford).

Harry and Sarah had two children who lived to adulthood:

- Lester C. was born January 1, 1886.
- Dora F. was born November 29, 1887. She taught piano and raised produce at home. She died in 1941.

Lester attended nearby Sovereign School and later Brown's Business College, but he ran the farm operation from age 13. On January 1, 1910, he married Lydia V Newquist of Rockford. He ran a threshing operation from a home near Charles and Washington, then from Irene in Boone County. Later he directed installation of sewer systems in Tuscumbia, AL, Brookhaven, MS, and a number of Wisconsin communities, living at 2112 N. Main St.

Lester and Lydia Rowley had three sons and a daughter:

- Warren Clinton was born in 1913. He became a farmer in Michigan.
- DeForest Lester was born in 1914. He worked for Barber-Colman as a methods man and tool designer. He was a resident of Winnebago and later the Wisconsin Dells.
- Murray Dwight (Mike) was born in 1917. He was a cost estimator in Fort Atkinson, Wisconsin and later lived in Arcadia, Florida. All sons were graduates of Rockford High School.
- Lydia June was born June 5, 1924 and was a graduate of Hononegah High School.

In the mid-1920s, L.C. Rowley convinced his father that was a good time to subdivide the front of the farm, on the south side of Broadway between 23rd and 26th Sts. A layout with curving streets that followed the natural watercourses was laid out and paved. The area was named Rainbow Ridge. A garage sized building was put up for sales and a set of salesmen trained (including Adolph Miller, who spoke Swedish, as did Harry Rowley). Opening day, marked with balloons and a stock tank of free soda pop, saw many people arrive with the purchase price of a lot in hand, although time payments were also offered. The family sat up all night with a shotgun until the money could be deposited at the bank the next day.

During the process of preparing the subdivision, the barns and most of the original farmhouse were pulled down. Some of the lumber was used in a set of garages on the alley. Sales continued until the Depression years but then dried up.

The money in the Third National Bank enabled Harry to survive those lean years. Neighboring Rolling Green subdivision, on the old Sovereign farm, went into bankruptcy.

Harry died January 27, 1942. Lester and family, who had tenanted two farms in Owen Township in the meantime, moved to 2903 Broadway. Empty lots were sold in the postwar years. Developer Martin Hawkinson bought the back 40 acres of the property, but the 25th St playground by Wesleyan Ave. was insisted upon by Lester in the agreement.

Lester died at the age of 69 in 1955 and Lydia at 83 in 1966. The home place has been owned for some years by their daughter Lydia and her husband, Roger W. Crandall. It is a large Victorian house set back from Broadway into the curve of 25th St., with evergreen trees planted generations ago shading the front yard.

EXCERPTS FROM *LOOKING DOWN MEMORY LANE*

By Clara Retzlaff Danielson

These excerpts were taken from a booklet written by Clara Retzlaff Danielson about her memories of growing up on a farm in what was then rural Winnebago County nearly 100 years ago. Reprinted with permission.

SOUNDS OF OLDEN DAYS

There are a great many sounds that were once as familiar as daylight but which are seldom or never heard today.

There was the well-known clop, clop of horses' feet. Each horse had a gait of his own and you could usually tell which one it was without even looking.

Iron-rimmed buggy or wagon wheels made a sound all their own. In the wintertime the sleigh runners squeaked as they slid over the snow and the sleigh bells made fairy music on a crisp frosty night. There were many other bells, too; church bells, dinner bells, school bells, little bells the teacher kept on her desk to

call the class to attention. Then there was the clang of the fire bells and the music of the cow bells.

The factory bells rang at 7 AM, noon, and at 6 PM. People could and did set their clocks by them.

When you wanted water you didn't have a faucet to turn on, you had to go to the pump in the yard. Every pump had a different sound as you worked the handle up and down. The windmill had a jangle when the wind set it going to pump water.

There was the clunk-clunk sound of the steam threshing machine engine, the slapping sound of the belt and the shrill blast of the steam whistle. There was the clatter of the mower in the hay fields, and the rattle of the hayfork as it lifted great loads of hay from the wagon into the haymow.

Blacksmiths were plentiful then and there never has been a sound to compare with the ringing of a hammer on an anvil, or the roaring of the fire in the forge, or the hiss of the red hot horseshoe plunged into the water.

In the early winter mornings you could hear the sounds of someone shaking down the ashes, poking clinkers out of the base burner in the kitchen range and the pouring of a scuttle full of coal into the fire.

Instead of a radio or alarm clock, you were awakened by the "cock-a-doodle-doo" of a rooster and later on you would hear the cackling of a hen announcing she had just laid an egg.

In the house you heard the singing of the teakettle, the slosh, and slosh of the churn as you worked the dasher up and down and the crunch of the coffee grinder.

Perhaps the most magical sound of all was the whistle of the steam engine as the train was speeding through the night. Fainter and fainter it sounded as the train sped into the distance and it finally died altogether. All these sounds are gone that were once so familiar.

THE ROARING 20'S

The symbols of the era were raccoon coats and the Charleston. If you belonged to a certain group, if you didn't own a raccoon coat it was a great tragedy and if you didn't dance the Charleston you were considered hopelessly passé'.

Men wore suits for most occasions with white shirts with stiffly starched collars and derby hats. The absolutely up-to-the-minute dress for a young man was white flannel trousers with a white shirt and tie, a dark blue or brown jacket and a stiff straw hat with a colored band around the crown. The ladies wore dresses of chiffon, georgette or crepe de sheen for dress up. They were made with panels and flounces; the hemline was from 8 to 10 inches from the floor. Hemlines continued to rise and were just below the knee and waistlines dropped until they reached the hips.

Sportswear for girls consisted of a "Tom-Boy" shirt made of flannel with a hip pocket, a white shirt-like blouse, bobby socks and brown or black and white saddle shoes.

Cars were becoming more plentiful but far from common and the first roadster with rumble seats made their appearance. Riding in the rumble seat with your one and only on a moonlit night was something unforgettable.

Amusement Parks were popular - there were two in Rockford; Harlem Park and Central Park. Night after night they were crowded with young people. I danced my very first dance at Harlem Park at age 16. I dated the young man several times and to this day we are friends.

There was no thrill like riding the roller coaster, zooming up to the heights and then dropping into nothingness with a speed that took your breath away. Big name bands came to Rockford to play for dances at both parks. If you didn't feel like dancing, there were concession stands where you could win Kewpie dolls, cut glass pitchers or other useful items by shooting moving ducks or tossing a certain number of balls into the right holes.

If you were hungry you could buy a Denver sandwich and wash it down with "Green River" or "Old Crow Ginger Ale" and to please your sweet tooth you could buy a banana split or chocolate sundae.

On Sundays our whole family attended Harlem Park - brothers going to the roller coaster and skating rink, and we girls going to the dance pavilion. Mother and dad listened to the music and songs by Bob Daily.

It really was a clean fun time and I wish I could go back for at least one day.

DAIRY PROCESSING

Years ago every farmer had a herd of milk cows. Some people who lived in town kept a cow so that they had their own fresh milk and butter.

The farmer had a three-legged stool, which he sat on while milking. When the flies were too bothersome, the cows would be sprayed so as to keep the flies off. If not, the flies would be pesky thereby causing the cow to switch its tail to ward them off and of course that didn't feel good, as the farmer would be switched in his face and that really stung.

Some milk was sold just as it came from the cow - quite often it was "separated" which meant that the cream was removed from it. To separate the milk it was poured into shallow pans and left overnight in a cool place. Then the cream had risen to the top and was skimmed off by hand with a tin skimmer (a dipper shaped affair made for that purpose). The cream was saved for making butter, and the skim milk was fed to the pigs and chickens. The meat from milk-fed chickens was more tender and tasty and the eggs also were tastier.

Then there was a milk house with a big water tank in it. This was always built close to the windmill so the cold water was pumped into it directly from the well. Lowering the milk can into the tank of cold water caused the cream to rise faster. This was an improvement over the open pan method.

Some farmers sold their milk directly to the dairies and they did the separating. Usually a milk stand was built near the road and a dairyman would drive through the country and pick up the cans of milk from the farmers. He then delivered it to the dairy for a small fee from the farmer.

The next time it seems so hard to go to the grocery store for a quart of milk or a pound of butter, it might be worthwhile for you to give a thought to all the work a farmer of long ago had to do to obtain milk.

THRESHING TIME

This was the time of year when all the neighbors came to help. The men who ran the threshing machine always brought it the night before and it was such a thrill to see the huge machine come steaming into the driveway and on to its position near the barn.

Early the next morning came the "threshing crew," all the men in the neighborhood. In a short time the machine was ready to start and big wagonloads of grain bundles began arriving from the field. Men began throwing the bundles into the machine and the grain came pouring out into wagons that were backed up to the machine and the straw was blown out another spout to form a huge straw stack. A few men would tramp continuously on the straw to make a more compact and even stack. That was a perfect place for the youngsters for sliding down.

In the meantime, interesting things were going on in the house, as all the ladies in the neighborhood were there to help mother with the cooking and serving. There usually were 24 hungry men to feed with a good hearty farm dinner.

It was hard to decide which was the best place to be - by the threshing machine with all the clatter and excitement, or in the house with all those delicious odors coming from the kitchen. Fortunately, the distance from one place to the other wasn't so great and we were able to divide our time pretty evenly between the two attractions.

When the dinner was over and all the dishes were washed, the ladies had to start right over again to make supper for the men. As a rule, most of the men had to hurry home to do their daily chores such as milking and feeding livestock, so we never had as many men for supper as for dinner.

This was a long hard-working day, but with so many friends helping it made it a most pleasurable day and for the children, it was all fun.

There was something good about families working together and helping each other. No one had to teach them what togetherness meant, they already knew.

WE LEARNED BY "DOING"

We were encouraged to work at a very early age. Mother always said "work hard now when you are young so you will not have to when you get old." At that time, Social Security didn't exist, so most people worked until they passed away.

We did not read books explaining our chores; we just did them as asked by our parents. We never questioned "why" or said; "No, we do not want to do it," we just did everything that was requested of us.

Mother worked hard in her garden and with her poultry so we were expected to care for the house. We had our special chores to do; I did the dusting, sister

Susie took charge of the lamps – filling them with kerosene, trimming wicks, washing the glass chimneys, and all the other regular chores such as setting the table and doing the dishes. In the winter, it was our duty to carry in and fill the wood boxes with wood from the supply in the wood shed.

Mother taught me to darn socks at age eight and I have had a great love for a needle ever since. I enjoy needlepoint and counted cross-stitching.

Mother raised many ducks and geese. The small ducks and goslings loved the water. A creek ran through our farm and it didn't take long for the ducks and goslings to discover it. They loved to swim and play in the water, and we had to follow them on the creek bank so no harm would come to them as there were turtles in the creek and they would snap at their legs and pull them under the water surface and gobble them up - so it was our job to rescue them. This went on for hours every day until they were large enough to defend themselves.

During berry picking time we all helped. When our berry picking was finished, many times mother sent my brother and me to help our neighbors with their berry picking. We were paid 2 cents a quart. We were happy with that pay and it also taught us to help people.

During the long winter evenings, mother, Susie, Charlotte and I would all sit around our dining room table with only a kerosene lamp for light and we all did our own thing under mother's supervision. Mother crocheted, Susie tatted, Charlotte embroidered and I pieced quilts. Mother was determined to teach us all these things, and told us that when we were married it would be necessary to be able to cook and sew.

MARSH SCHOOL

All the children walked to a one-room school, which was taught by an unmarried teacher. Married women were not allowed to teach. My teacher, Edyth Bergstrom, was my idol. I adored her, and I always thought I would love to be just like her when I grew up. By the way, we stayed in close contact until her death in 1960.

I recall how cold my fingers were when walking to school in the wintertime and she would always hold them in cold water until they felt normal again. Also, I could not pronounce the "r's" as a small girl and one day I needed to borrow a ruler from my brother. As I stood near his desk begging for his ruler he insisted I say "r" before giving me the ruler, but no "r" could come from my lips. Soon Miss

Bergstrom came to my rescue and requested my brother give me the ruler. She always sat beside my desk whenever I needed help, and I felt real privileged to have her sit with me.

The school was heated with a coal burning pot bellied stove. Two outhouses behind the school substituted for plumbing.

Our teacher walked to school every morning from what is now North 2nd Street and Springcreek Road to Marsh School on Springbrook Road, between Alpine and Mulford Roads. During the coldest part of the winter, Miss Bergstrom would sometimes stay at our house so her walk to school wasn't as far. This school is now a private residence.

Our water supply came from an outside well, pumped into a pail, which was then carried into the school. Each pupil had his or her own tin cup to drink from.

All eight grades were taught in that one room. As each different grade recited, the students would go to the front of the room and sit on a bench provided for that purpose. Miss Bergstrom was an excellent teacher, for when I entered high school; I did not have to study for the first year as Miss Bergstrom had taught us everything we were learning in my first year of high school.

I think of dear Miss Bergstrom often and feel pleased and honored that we stayed in close contact during her entire life.

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6799 Guilford Rd.
Rockford, IL 61107

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NUGGETS OF HISTORY is published quarterly by the Rockford Historical Society, 6799 Guilford Rd., Rockford, Illinois 61107. Society members receive NUGGETS upon payment of annual dues. New rates, effective January 1, 2007: Family @ \$20, Individual @ \$15, 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.

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