

Rockwood - Forgotten Glory
BY
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This compiling is entitled 'Rockwood, Forgotten Glory' because people of today cannot vision the real life that once was part of this village.

The earliest book on Randolph County, Illinois history is Montague's Historical Sketches of Randolph County, Published in 1859.

It states that a John Hickman built a house in 1805, but this land has since been taken by the Mississippi River. In 1806 or 1807, Mr. John Mansker built a cabin at the head of the island opposite the town and opened a farm there. Samuel Mansker built the first house within the limits of the present town and in 1859 this house was occupied by Mr. Silas P. Tuthill.

The first store was started by a James McCormack, Mr. John Stearns came from Tennessee in 1821, purchased the land and laid out lots in the upper part of the town. This original Part of the town we north of Jones Creek and actually had two streets named Oak and Walnut. Later additions south of Jones Creek were the Fricky Addition, Barber Addition, Worth & English Addition, Dean's Addition, J. L. Mann Addition and the Scudamore Addition. The streets of these later additions were Bark, Mill, Division, Clinton, St. Clair, St. Charles, Washington, Jackson and Jefferson streets. One street running north and south parallel with the Mississippi River was called State Street. The town was confined to a narrow strip of land between the bluffs and the river.

The town was called 'Liberty', but the post office was named 'Jones Creek' and the post office name was older than the name of Liberty. Emsley Jones settled in this part of the county and it is thought that the post office name came from this family.

Emsley Jones killed a neighbor and his hanging was the first in the county.

About four years after Mr. Stearns laid out the town, Capt. W. B. Charles, James Dean, Dr. Nathaniel Manning, Harvey Clendenin, Samuel Barber, Thomas Frazier and E. G. Hall settled in the town and gave a decided impetus to the growth of the town. The town was incorporated in 1837 and the first town Clerk was Harvey Clendenin. He was also the first postmaster of Jones Creek and he was my Great Grandfather.

Mansker, Clendenin and Barber established a store and dealt heavily in grain and produce and at this time, there was more corn shipped from Liberty to New Orleans than from any other part of the county. I am quoting from a letter dated 'Liberty, Randolph Co, Illinois May 24, 1837' from Harvey Clendenin to his brother-in-law, Samuel Barber at New Orleans- "You recollect of hearing me speak when I was at Orleans last of Gilbert & Swanwick having a demand on J. H. Graham which they wanted me to collect for them. I informed them by letter that if they would send you the order you could perhaps have their demand...you can get it settled in the way of that grocery acceptance....Money matters are somewhat hard at present there being so many banks now that their paper are not current which makes collections difficult. I had forty dollars of Mississippi paper left with me to try and get off if I could if the J.B. Prairie will take it and pass off on her way down and account to you for it. I have about the same amount of Orleans paper that belongs to us which I will also send for it is not very current here at this time...I have not tried to force any collections as yet...as those who have given their notes are taken at ten percent interest. The weather continues cool even up to this time vegetation is now backward by three weeks than I ever saw it at this season of the year."

From this letter we have some idea of the problems of the times concerning money matters and interest rates.

The first town Board of Trustees of Liberty consisted of Wm. B. Charles, Nathaniel Manning, John D. Stearns, John Stearns, and Jacob Parks. In 1858, John Preston Mann bought lots one and two from Silas P. Tuthill and built his house and he and his wife lived in it until their deaths in 1908 and 1912 respectively.

When Montague's History was published in 1859, Silas P. Tuthill was listed as a chair maker in Liberty, Illinois.

The next published history of Randolph County, Illinois was Brink's Atlas of 1875, by W. R. Brink & Co. of Illinois and on page 30, we find this on Township 8 South, Range 5 west:

"The town and post office both were called Rockwood, a change was made in the name from Liberty to Rockwood by Legislature in February 1865 as there was another town named Liberty in the State."

There was upper town and lower town in Rockwood vernacular. Dr. Nathaniel Manning, a doctor, who came from Missouri, lived in upper town, but his house no longer exists. My Mother, Mary Alice Mann Bilderback, was born in the Dr. Manning house in 1857. My Paternal Grandmother, Martha Jane Stafford Bilderback also lived with this Dr. Manning family before her marriage to my Grandfather, Ephraim Porter Bilderback. In the early pictures of the town, there was a foot bridge across Jones Creek. The little house which was the barn at the John P. Mann home was a three room building. A Mr. Jake Houker once lived in it and later it was a drug store and a music teacher moved there and gave organ lessons. Alice Mann took organ lessons from this woman. But Alice had to drive in a wagon by way of Welge, Illinois, stop with an uncle over night, then on to Sparta, Illinois where she purchased an

organ and than made the return trip home, but since her beau was driving the wagon, the trip was, most likely, a pleasure!

The Main street, State Street of early Liberty was where the railroad was later located and what is now State Route 3 was a narrow pathway at the back of the houses. But about 1885, the river left Rockwood high and dry and the back doors became the front doors!

Today, where you leave the pavement to go thru Rockwood to the Ebenezer Community, was the Harry home, later owned by Lou and Taylor Simmons. This was the most immaculate home you could imagine, The Simmons had no family. Today, the pavement has almost destroyed the front yard of this home, now owned by Virgil Simpson.

In early Liberty, down below on the river bank, was the Dr. Clendenin house and the road went down towards the Mississippi River and turned South. Then came the Walter's home, then the John Preston Mann house, (now owned by the Postmistress Mrs. Mansker) then the James Luther Mann house, then the John Clendenin house which burned years ago. The Daans had a very nice home in lower town. The Mann home, originally had a portico at the front or river side of the house and you entered thru a wide front hall which extended from the front to the back of the house. This house had no fireplaces as the wife remembered how you could freeze on one side and burn up on the other from the heat from fireplaces and insisted on stoves. The parlor stove is now a collector's item, a little long-shaped iron stove, with two doors which opened and gave the appearance of a fireplace. Two small pipes went up into a round drum which gave off the heat for the room. I am most happy that I have this stove.

Along the Mississippi River road were the business houses. First, came Jones Store and Post Office, than Peter Wagner's Drug Store, then John Clendenin's General Store, which was smaller than the Richards

and Clendenin Store, then the flour mill, with the cooper house above on the hillside. Now, we drive over the pavement of State Route 3 where the cooper house was located. The coopers would be in the cooper house clicking away on the barrels and the barrels were sent down a chute to the mill. I have the old stencil that was used to put the brand names on the wooden barrels of flour. It is a round, metal stencil and reads:

"Clendenin's, 196 lbs, 3X Family Flour, Rockwood, Ills*"

Below the mill, there were Walter's Store, which was a general store which sold whiskey, then Richard's and Clendenin's double store, which had both dry goods, groceries and had a drug store with Mr. Taylor Simmons as druggist, then there was Dean's General Store.

In the very early days, there was a saloon in town which was a very rough saloon. A young man was killed in a brawl and the women of the town banded together, went in a group to the saloon and broke in the barrels of whiskey and, in general, ruined the saloon. The sheriff came from Chester and arrested the ladies and they had to ride horse-back Chester and each paid a fine of \$16.00. The roads were so muddy that the horses sank into the mud up to their knees. For twenty years after that, liquor was not sold in Liberty. Some of the ten women in the 'raid' were Becky Brown, Grandmother of the late Cora Brown Rollo; Emily Young Mann, Grandmother of Margaret Mann McNabney of Chester; Nancy Clendenin Mann, Grandmother of Mildred Bilderback Midjaas; and Sally Baldrige Mann, Grandmother of Louise Mann Juergens of Chester. Nancy Clendenin Mann and Emily Young Mann were not the type of women to go out on such a public affair, so they must have been much upset over the killing*

Again, in 1902, there was a petition passed by the citizens of Rockwood to close a saloon run by a Mr. Tinapel.

to be continued . . .