



ROMEOVILLE: EARLY CANAL TOWN

Old Romeoville Picnic, 1977

Extracted from *Romeoville, Illinois* by Mabel Hrpcha

Location, Location, Location

The location of the Village of Romeoville is in the northwestern part of Will County, Illinois. The Village lies in two townships, the southwest corner of Du Page Township and the northwest corner of Lockport Township.

French Beginnings

The French were the first Europeans known to travel through the Des Plaines Valley. Isle a la Cache, an 80-acre island in the river, has an oral history relating it as a stopping place for the French fur trade. [Isle a la Cache is now a county museum on 135th St. east of Route 53]. But it was not until the 1830s that large numbers of settlers entered the area when access to the land surrounding the Great Lakes became easier due to the opening of the Erie Canal in New York. Settlers were brought to the area with the promise of a canal to be built that would connect the Great Lakes to the Mississippi.

Isn't it Romantic?

"Romeo" was one town planned by the Canal Commissioners along the proposed canal. It was named in honor of the Shakespearean hero and planned as a romantic twin city and rival for Juliet (later Joliet).

With visions of commercial prosperity from the projected canal, land speculators came to Romeo. A post office was established from October 29, 1833, to February 27, 1834, with John Blackstone as postmaster. The plat for Romeo was recorded September 14, 1835, in Cook County. Construction of the canal began in 1836. Due to various financial problems, it was not completed until 1848. During this time and for a number of years after its completion, land speculation was rampant all along the canal route.



Mabel Hrpcha and a couple of her close friends organized the first Old Romeoville Picnic in 1977 at Messenger Woods with descendants of early settlers. This year will be the last picnic to be held. From left to right: Herman Hakey (deceased), Ed Pavilich, Ed Senffner (deceased), Ed Pytlewski, Emil Fracaro (deceased).

Early Settlers

Many of the property holders at Romeo were those connected with the building of the canal. Some of the people associated with early property holdings in the Romeo area were Charles Boyer (Canal Commissioner), Norman and Clarinda Hawley, Colonel George Martin, Edward Hunter, William Egan, Nelson

Elwood, Orrin Jerome, Bernard Sharpe, Peter Correll, J.H. Carpenter, William Smith, Barney McCann, and Michael Farrell. By 1854, railroads were already starting to eclipse the canal for passenger and freight use.

Land Speculation and Profits

The land speculators did not see the profits they had expected from the sale of lots for the building of a town. Instead, people who saw the potential for the productive farmland bought large parcels of land.

May Meeting Prompts Romeoville Article

The Romeoville Historical Society hosted our May meeting at the Fountaindale Library. The Society's museum is housed in the library and is open by appointment. Please call Mabel Hrpcha at (815) 838-6236 for information. Also, copies of her book are for sale.

-continued on back page-

M

essage from the President

♪ June is bustin' out all over ♪

There is much to sing about. The season's ample cool rains and running streams, the flowers and budding trees have created a park-like setting—a welcome relief from the grayness of midwinter.



Dr. Reno G. Caneva

A time to renew membership & you.

Spring is a time for the rebirth of things natural. Likewise, it is a time for the renewal of all things good—like LAGHS! All of our charter members and many others continue to renew their memberships in the months of May and June. Don't forget to renew yours. ***We have an ambitious and worthy mission to preserve our heritage and your support is needed to insure success.***

From the days of the Native Americans, the Lockport area has been a favorite location in the Des Plaines River Valley, first for its abundance of natural resources, and later for its links to other places via canals, roads and railroads. It is a challenge to imagine Lockport through all of its transitions in business, industry and community, but our **book commemorating Lockport's 175th anniversary** is taking on that challenge.

You can help by sharing your maps, photos, and family stories with us. So, take out your old photo albums, climb up into your attic and open up your treasure chests of family stories

Our thanks to Dorothy Hassert, Mabel Hrpcha and Candy Hrpcha for hosting our May LAGHS meeting at the Romeoville Historical Museum. We were treated to a table of treats, a wonderful talk by Dorothy, and an enlightening tour of two huge rooms filled with Romeoville history. Look for an excerpt of a history of Romeoville by Mabel in this issue of the newsletter.

OLD CANAL DAYS is nearly here. **Mark your calendars for Friday, June 20. Don't miss our float in the PARADE!** The theme this year is *Lockport's Hometown Heroes*. We'll also have an Outreach table on Saturday and Sunday near the library. Let Bonnie Packley know if you can help staff the table for an hour or two.

Remember, June is our ANNUAL MEETING. We'll elect and install members to the Executive Board and share a coffee "&." And, Nancy Crilly will talk to us about her recent trip to Scotland and tell us what she learned about her genealogy research.

See you on June 28 at the Gladys Fox Museum.

Dr. Reno G. Caneva

EXECUTIVE BOARD

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*Preserving the Past is our
Present to the Future.*

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History in Our Own Back Yard

by Georgene Bankroff

Chautauqua

Going to Chicago? No, going to a chautauqua. It sounds like an Indian pow wow, but it really was a special entertainment back in the early part of the 20th century.

The chautauqua originated in the Methodist church, although the organizers did not identify the new program with their religious denomination. During the summer season, it was their method of teaching their Sunday school teachers something about the finer things of life.

It eventually became an occasion where people of all color, race, and religious persuasion came to enjoy themselves while learning much about their fellow Americans and the world around them. It was described as "a democratic gathering for the education, moral, and religious betterment of the people."

The chautauqua began in Lake Chautauqua, New York, and flourished in the Mid-West for over thirty years. It was a form of adult education that adopted its name from a program which began in 1874. This outdoor school was extended to include lectures, discussions, and home readings. The out-door school was an offshoot of the lyceum which was named for the place where Aristotle taught young Greek men. Lyceums flourished throughout the United States during the 19th century.

Our modern educational programs: adult summer school, university extension and correspondence courses, and Great Books discussion groups had their roots in chautauquas and lyceums. The Joliet Daily Republican newspaper of March 1, 1906, announced a 15-day meeting of the chautauqua at the price of \$1.50 for the whole 15 days. It was backed by many fraternal organizations.

The third meeting of the Joliet Chautauqua began at Dellwood Park, Lockport, "the prettiest spot in Illinois" on July 14-29, 1906. Featured were the greatest orators of the day. Catholics, Protestants, and Jews were invited to attend. There were 150 segments of entertainment for the \$1.50 season ticket.

Camping was available as was seating for 4,000 people, but no intoxicating liquors were allowed. Two electric cars ran from the Joliet terminal of the six city lines to the park for 5 cents. Entertainment at the chautauqua encompassed the following: from band concerts, Today's American Art, chorus of 100 voices, temperance hour, magicians, to the "Year 2000, by the wizard of electricity, a wonderful electric display."

The last day was a home talent day. The 1908 fifth



Chasing Your Tale

by Jacqueline Munch

REFERENCE MATERIALS

We now have the following reference materials with indexes in our collection and are willing to do look-ups for those doing research in the Lockport area. For researchers who are not members, a donation to our organization would be appreciated.

1860 Federal Census, Will County, Illinois; Extracts from 1870 U.S. Census for Lockport Township and The Village of Lockport, Illinois; 1935 Telephone Directory for Lockport, Romeoville, Joliet, Rockdale, Lemont and Plainfield, Illinois; Selections from early Will County, Illinois newspapers: *The Lockport Standard 1877-1878* and *The Will County Commercial Advertiser 1878-1880*; Lockport Cemetery; St. Dennis & Calvary Cemeteries, Lockport, Illinois; The Arsenal Cemeteries: German Evangelical, Klingler, McCune, Newton, Reed's Grove, Starr's Grove Barnet Cemetery, Gougar & Bruce Roads, Lockport, Illinois; Rudd Cemetery, Cherry Hill Road, Joliet, Illinois; Maplewood Cemetery, New Lenox, Illinois; Lockport Baptist Church 1844-1915.

The Parish Registers of St. John's Episcopal Church, Lockport, Illinois 1837-1967, our newest acquisition, was copied and prepared especially for LAGHS by Nancy Bruce Crilly. This document contains the entries for baptisms, marriages and burials with an every-name index. There is also a list of the clergymen from its beginning to 1987. **We are very grateful to Nancy for her advice and support, her donations and all the time and effort she put into preparing many of the above reference materials.**

Contact Georgene and Jacquie

with your comments and questions at:

Georgene: (815) 838-1862 or KG1990@aol.com

Jacquie: (815) 838-3795 or jlmunch@earthlink.com

Genealogy begins as an interest, Becomes a hobby, Continues as an avocation, Takes over as an obsession, And in its last stages, Is an incurable disease. – Author Unknown

Chautauqua

annual Joliet Chautauqua was held for 10 days at Dellwood Park. Dr. Rev. McGovern of St. Dennis Church was said to plan to join? the chautauqua community. The chautauqua provided "live" entertainment to a broad group of Americans who had neither radio nor television to enlighten their lives. With the advent of movies, cars, radios, and television, chautauqua came to a quiet end after 30 years of educating and entertaining the public. The last vestige of the chautauqua is the Red Oak Chautauqua Park, in Red Oak, Iowa, where chautauquas had been held for many years. ~

Outreach with Bonnie Packley

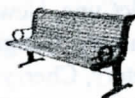
Membership Committee

Call Bonnie Packley if you can help host the OUTREACH table at Old Canal Days on Saturday, June 21 and Sunday June 22. Thanks to Paul Burandt for staffing the table at the Lockport Community Expo along with Betty Shin, Nancy Wilda, and Reno Caneva.



Bonnie

In Memory: We mourn the passing of Century Club member Dr. John (Jack) Roberts. At our meeting in February 2001 our members reminisced with the doctor about his having delivered several LAGHS family members and about his recollections about living in Lockport. Steve Potter passed away on May 14 after sharing so much of time and so many of his wonderful postcards depicting the Lockport area. We will remember him always for his good humor and enthusiasm for the preservation of Dellwood Park as a unique chapter in our heritage. (see *From the Park Bench*)



From the Park Bench

Dellwood Vision Plan Presented

Erwin Klopstein and Bonnie Packley made a presentation to 25 members of the American Association of University Women on Monday, May 19. The program was enthusiastically received, members asking many questions and offering comments on the subject. Prepared by Steve Potter, Erwin Klopstein, Bonnie Packley and Char Giardina, the presentation focuses on the park's unique contribution to local history and the Society's vision for the site as a place for visitors to learn about its past while enjoying its current park and recreational opportunities.

Erwin and Bonnie previously made the presentation to the Lockport Township Park District. A written proposal was submitted by the Society for consideration in developing the park district Master Plan.

Steve (see *In Memory*, above) originated the vision plan with Erwin and provided the postcard images for the slide presentation and the proposal packet.

From the Archive with Erwin Klopstein

Archive Committee

LAGHS received a warm 'thank you' from the Will/Grundy Counties Genealogical Society for providing them with a copy of *Lockport World War II Veterans Scrapbook Collection*, assembled by LAGHS historian Georgene Bankroff and her staff (see insert, below).



Erwin

Dear Friends:

Our Society gratefully acknowledges your gift of a copy of the Lockport World War II Veterans Scrapbook Collection ... we are deeply appreciative of this valuable addition to our library source material, and we are touched by your gesture of sharing...

Sincerely,

*Patricia Nugent, WGGS Librarian
Nancy Bruce Crilly, WGGS President*

Several journals and newsletters from local, state, and national associations have been received. These publications are a benefit of LAGHS membership in other organizations. They provide us with invaluable

information on research and management and keep us linked to the world-wide community of genealogy and history.

Minutes of the General Membership



President Reno G. Caneva called the meeting of the Lockport Area Genealogical Society to order on May 28, 2003, at 8:30 a.m. at the Fountaindale Library in Romeoville, Ill. After the Pledge of Allegiance, the president welcomed members and guests and thanked the Romeoville Historical Society for hosting the meeting. Brief committee reports were given. Society President Dorothy Hassert gave a talk, members toured the museum rooms and enjoyed refreshments. Adjourned, 10:45a.m.



Char

Summaries of committee activities are printed elsewhere in the Newsletter and reports are on file with the Secretary. Submit any corrections to Charlene Giardina, secretary.

Executive Board Nominees Announced—Election, Saturday, June 28, 2003

Nominating Committee

Committee chair Candy Hrpcha and committee members, Rich Ramos and Bonnie Carlson confirmed that the following have agreed to be nominated for office: First Vice President-Nancy Wilda, Secretary-Candy Hrpcha, Archivist-Erwin Klopstein, Historian-Georgene Bankroff, Librarian-Ruth Waldvogel, Directors-Paul Burandt, Bonnie Packley and John Lamb.

Nominations may be submitted from the floor.

Vacancies Filled

The following were elected by the board to fill vacancies until the election of June 2004: President-Reno G. Caneva, Second Vice President-Charlene Giardina, Treasurer-Glenn Carlson, Genealogist-Jacqueline Munch, Directors-John (Jack) Brassal, Richard Cronholm and Gary Ward (one vacancy remains).

Lockport Area Genealogical & Historical Society Membership

New membership ☐ Renewal ☐ (your expiration date is on the mailing label)

In addition or in lieu of membership, please accept my donation of \$ ☐

Individual or Household \$20.00 ☐

Business/nonprofit \$35.00 ☐

Life \$495.00 ☐

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Address _____ City _____ State _____ ZIP code _____

The Membership is a Gift From: Name _____ Contact #s: _____

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Please mail to: LAGHS, c/o B. Packley, 1016 Maitland Drive, Lockport, IL, 60441

Romeoville, continued

Grain and Stone—Canals and Railroads

Romeo became economically dependent on nearby agriculture and dairy farms. Granaries and the movement of farm products by barge and railroad became important in the Village. During this era, some families who invested in farm land in Romeo were Michael Farrell, J.C. McDonald, Joseph Gerharz, Peter Van Deuce, Charles Weeks, Vogt, Thomas Rairdon, Henry Burkhart, Naylor and Smith.

In the last quarter of the nineteenth century, stone quarrying developed as an important business in the area. Romeo had the distinction of being called "Stone City." The Bruce and Garden families ran one of these quarries in Romeo.

Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal

A time of growth occurred in the Village between 1892 and 1900 with the construction of the Chicago Sanitary & Ship Canal. While many of these canal workers were transient, others remained in the area to work in the quarries. Others found employment just as the canal workers on the I & M Canal had done fifty years previously. They settled and made their homes in the area. Residents of the area during this time were the families of Louis and Martha Hamann, Frederick and Mary Boehme, Edward and Mary A. Swanson, Henry Brockman, John and Margaret Keig, Stephen and Anna Startz, William and John Miller, and William Schields.

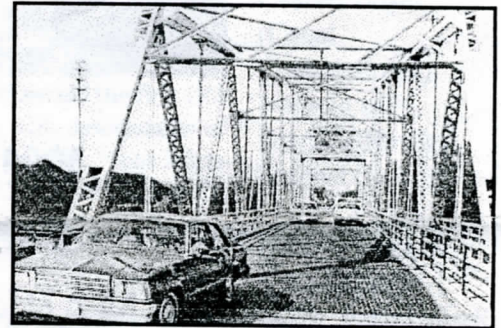
Village Incorporation

On January 19, 1895, residents voted at Miller's Barbershop, 42 to 20, for incorporation of the village. The official name became Romeoville. Judges for the referendum were Thomas Farrell, Louis Hamann, and William Miller. The board of Trustees elected Louis Hamann the first village president of Romeoville.

The 135th Street Bridge

Built in 1899, the bridge's distinctive hairpin turn is no longer a problem for drivers since it was removed to the Centennial Trail in 1990.

Early rules fined owners between \$10 - \$50 for "more than five head of cattle" on the bridge at a time.



20th Century Brings Change

The first quarter of the 20th century saw a decline in Romeoville's prospects. With the closing of the stone quarries and no new businesses, the area became a rural residential and recreational area. The streetcar line that ran along what is now New Avenue made it possible for men to find work outside the area, such as the Joliet Steel Mill. Residents between 1900 and 1925 were the families of Jack, Nicholas and Frank Zager; George, Matthew and Anthony Senffner; Matthew Berush, Gasper Dorich, Sam Heeg, Nicholas Fracaro, George Pounovich, George Baxter, Anthony Ulmenak, Jacob Kubat (Kobart), Neal Murphy, Louis Bonkalski, Albert Strom, John Mitchell, Harold Lindstrom, and Chris and Louise Hanson.

Census figures show 180 residents in 1930, 170 in 1940, and 147 in 1950. In 1957, however, Romeoville entered a new era in its history. Over 600 acres of farm land west of the Des Plaines River on Illinois Route 53 were annexed to the village for development of the Hampton Park Subdivision. In 1964, another section of 446 acres of the subdivision was annexed to the village. From 197 residents in 1957, the population grew to 6,358 residents in 1963. ~

Update: According the Village Manager's office, the census of 2000 recorded 10,000 residents, but estimates put the figure closer to 30,000 because of the surge in housing, industrial manufacturing and warehousing. Romeoville's growth is contributing to Will County's distinction as the fastest growing county in the state and one of the fastest growing counties in the nation.

Lockport Area Genealogical & Historical Society

c/o Bonnie Packley
1016 Maitland Drive
Lockport, IL 60441



Vintage Reproduction Postcards

~Dellwood Park~
~Downtown Lockport~
\$39.95 (each set of 12)

INSIDE

Romeoville: Early Canal Town
Nominees for 2003-2005
Chataugua
Reference Material

60441+2321



MARK YOUR CALENDARS



Old Canal Days

See LAGHS' Parade Float—
Lockport's Hometown Heroes
on Friday, June 20 at 6 pm
and

LAGHS' OUTREACH TABLE
(near the library)
on Sat. June 21 and Sun. 22

Also

Lockport's Natural Landscape
LTHS photography class displays
pictures at the Gaylord Building.

Also

Journey into the Past
at Pioneer Settlement and Wright
Brothers and Gold Rush exhibits
at the I & M Canal Museum.

ANNUAL MEETING

Board Members Election & Installation

Saturday, June 28, 2003, at 8:30 a.m.

Gladys Fox Museum

Program:

*What I did on my spring vacation
in Scotland . . with Nancy Crilly*

Bring a Breakfast Snack to Share

New Time and Place

for Executive Board Meeting

Thursday, July 17 at 7PM
Des Plaines Valley Public Library
Lockport