

ROCK ISLAND HISTORY

A COMPANION TO THE
ARCHITECTURAL WALKING TOURS



ROCK ISLAND
ILLINOIS

ROCK ISLAND HISTORY:
A COMPANION TO THE ARCHITECTURAL WALKING TOURS

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This history is intended as a Companion to Rock Island's historical and architectural walking tour booklets , which include: Highland Park Historic District, 20th Street Residential Area, Downtown Rock Island, 22nd & 23rd Streets Residential Area, Spencer Place / 19th Street Area, Olof Z. Cervin 1918 Government Housing, Western Downtown, the Chicago Addition, KeyStone Neighborhood, KeyStone's Park View Addition and Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture.

Preface 1999 (Revised Printing)

As we move forward into the next millenium, it is important to celebrate our past. Rock Island was the first of the Quad Cities settled over 160 years ago. It is the story of strength and determination of the men and women who called Rock Island home and who laid the foundations for our rich and vibrant past. Today we see a renaissance in Rock Island, with the creative preservation and restoration of the historic fabric of the landmarks created by our forefathers. Today's urban pioneers possess the same strength and determination of those early pioneers, continuing the legacy of this city on the banks of the mighty Mississippi. May *Rock Island History* stand as a testament to those who have made Rock Island great, while always "preserving the past, while being dedicated to the future."

Jeffrey S. Dismer, Chairman
Rock Island Preservation Commission

Preface 1992 (Original Printing)

The history of Rock Island is rich and colorful. The spirit that brought the westward migration and travel up and down the Mississippi River brought an energy and boisterousness to the town as it grew. This energy was exhibited in the city's culture, lifestyle and architecture. It continues in the city's spirit today as the mark made by its settlers and founders lives on in the landscape. I hope you enjoy this brief narrative of a most colorful segment of the city's history.

William L. Cleaver, Chairman
Rock Island Preservation Commission

Original Printing 1992
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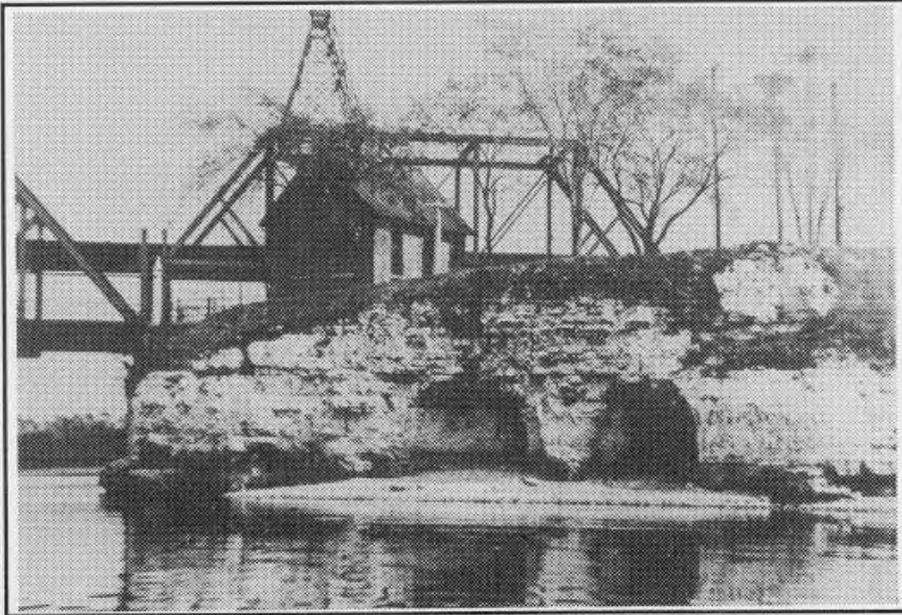
HISTORY OF THE CITY OF ROCK ISLAND UP TO 1940

EARLY SETTLEMENT

The earliest historic inhabitants of the area were the Sauk and the Mesquakie or Fox Indians. They chose to build a permanent summer village called Saukenuk on the north shore of the Rock River for the same geographical reasons that would later draw white settlers: navigable waterways, good soil, and adequate natural resources. Saukenuk, at the turn of the nineteenth century, was orderly and prosperous, with 60 to 100 communal lodges lining its streets and avenues. Surrounding the village were pastures for grazing horses, and some 800 acres of cultivated land where crops of corns, beans, pumpkins, and squash were grown. In winter, the Indians temporarily abandoned Saukenuk to hunt game and harvest maple syrup.

The first white visitors to Saukenuk were fur trappers whose nomadic existence posed no real threat to the Native American way of life. However, events following the War of 1812 opened the area to pioneers who were determined to engage in the lucrative fur trade as well as to settle and farm the land. This clash of cultures led to the expulsion of the Sauk and Mesquakie from Illinois.

The War of 1812 seriously divided the two tribes. The main body of Mesquakie and many of the Sauk moved across the Mississippi to avoid the conflict with the newly arrived settlers. However, some 200 Sauk chose to



Early photograph of the Arsenal Island caves. Note the height of the cliff and its defensible possibilities as the site of Fort Armstrong.

remain at Saukenuk under their war chief, Makataimeshke iakiak, or Black (Sparrow) Hawk, and fight for the British, a fact that the mostly American settlers never forgot.

Two years after the war ended in 1816, Black Hawk and his people watched as an

army fort was built on the western tip of a three mile island mass in the Mississippi River, now called Arsenal Island. Strategically positioned at the foot of the Rock Island Rapids, and protected against flood or attack by 25 foot

limestone cliffs, the island was an ideal location from which to monitor the Indians and safeguard American interests in the fur trade. The army named it Fort Armstrong in honor of General John Armstrong, a former Secretary of War. To the Sauks, who owned the island and revered it as a home of the Great Spirit, the fort was an ominous sign of American power. To land hungry pioneers, it was a reassuring presence that encouraged settlement.



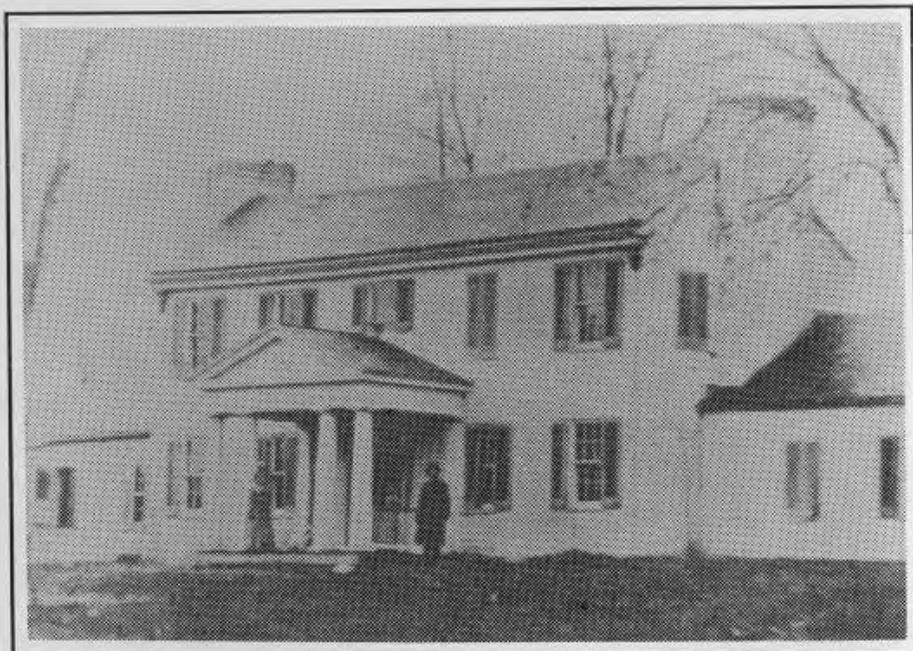
George Davenport

One of the first white settlers to the area was a former Englishman called George Davenport. He originally came with his family to act as sutler to Fort Armstrong and quickly built a home that doubled as a trading post on the northern edge of the island. An astute businessman, he soon became a power in the fur trade and an influential force in the development of the entire area. Discussions at his second home on the island resulted in the mapping of the cities of Rock Island and Davenport and the planning of the first rail bridge across the Mississippi. Davenport's

role in the history of the area was cut short by his murder in 1845, in an upstairs bedroom of his house. When three men were hanged for this crime in Rock Island, it is said that the crowd witnessing the execution far exceeded the

actual population of the town. The reconstructed Davenport family home can still be seen on Arsenal Island.

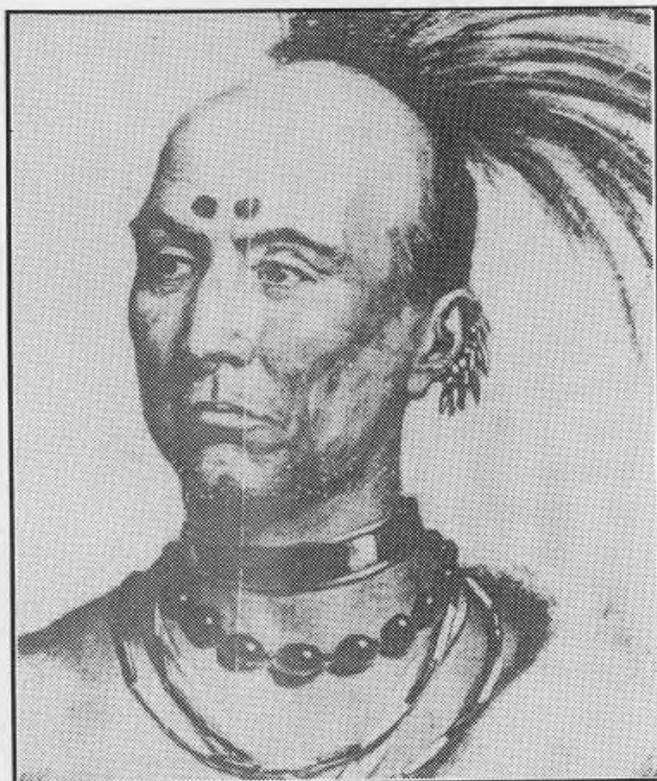
In 1818, Illinois became a state and in 1823 the first steamboat arrived from St. Louis at Fort Armstrong. Other boats soon followed and the move to settle the area began in earnest.



The Davenport home on Arsenal Island.

THE BLACK HAWK WAR

Citing a suspect treaty of 1804, in which the Sauk and Mesquakie had ceded their Illinois lands to the U.S. Government, white settlers encroached on Native American lands and even moved into some lodges of Saukenuk. When Rock Island County was created in 1831, it included the Sauk village; Black Hawk reluctantly agreed to move into Iowa and never return. A year later, in the spring of 1832, Black Hawk broke the treaty and led his people back across the Mississippi. The ensuing panic resulted in the Black Hawk War.

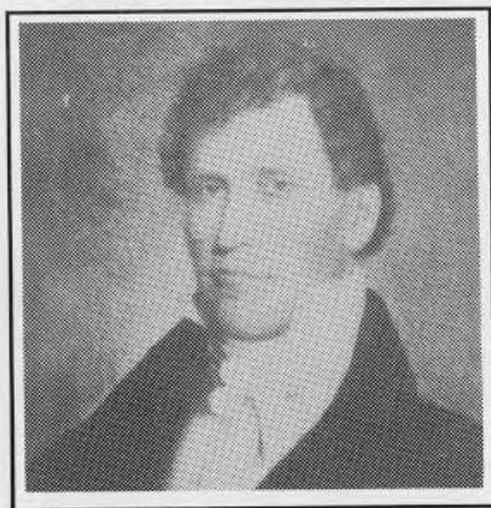


Chief Black Hawk in 1833.

Chased by a combined army of volunteers and regulars, including two future presidents (Zachary Taylor and Abraham Lincoln), Black Hawk retreated to Wisconsin and was defeated at the Battle of Bad Axe on August 2, 1832. Of the 1,000 Sauk who had crossed the Mississippi in April, fewer than 150, including Black Hawk, survived the war. A Treaty signed at Fort Armstrong stripped the Sauk of all their lands on both sides of the Mississippi.

COMMUNITY ESTABLISHMENT

Although the Black Hawk War only lasted three months, it had been nationally reported and Rock Island was no longer just a name on a map. With the fear of Indians gone and the lure of cheap and fertile land, white settlers moved in quickly.



Russell Farnham.

The first real community in the county was situated north of present day 5th Avenue and 29th Street. It was called Farnhamsburg, in honor of Russell Farnham, who had been a partner with George Davenport in the fur trade.

When the actual town was platted in 1835 on 61.95 acres of rather swampy lowland between 10th and 17th Streets, it bore the name Davenport. However, one of the state legislators, James Stroud, objected because of derogatory remarks George Davenport had made about him during the Black Hawk

War. After much debate, the new town was called Stephenson instead.

Rapid growth followed and in 1839 the first local newspaper boasted that Stephenson had about 175 "neatly built houses," 600 inhabitants, including three doctors and four lawyers, various stores, three taverns, and a two-story courthouse.

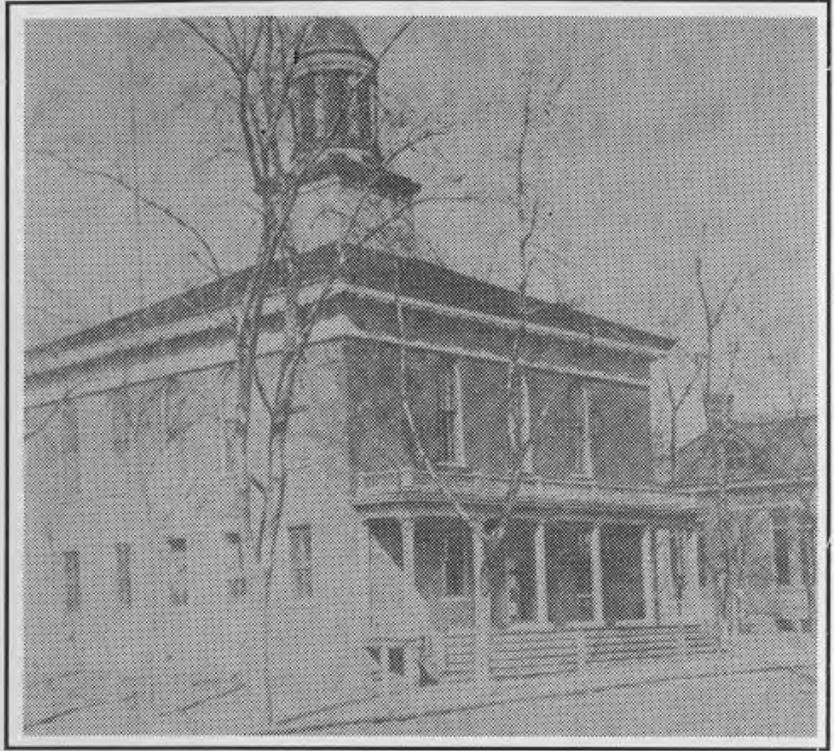
By 1841, when the town incorporated and changed its

name to Rock Island, it could offer its increasing population a wider variety of businesses, religious and educational opportunities, and even some entertainment.

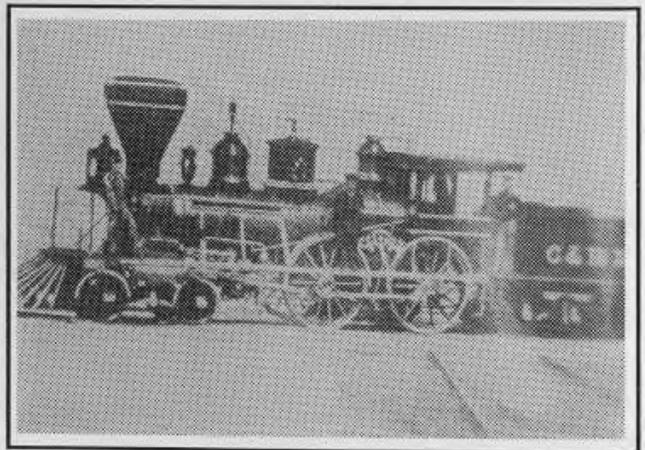
Several factors contributed to the town's prosperity. The same rivers that had carried the canoes of Indians, explorers and fur trappers now served as transportation routes for goods and immigrants from the industrialized southeast to the rapidly expanding northwest. Rock Island, at the center of some 1,200 miles of navigable waterways, could ship goods in many directions. The town also benefited from being at the foot of the Rock Island rapids. Boats going upstream usually stopped at Rock Island to take on a pilot to help navigate the treacherous rapids and, in low water, goods and passengers were transferred to flat boats or hauled by wagon around the rapids. The fees for such services were high and brought much needed revenue to the fledgling community.

ROCK ISLAND: TRANSPORTATION HUB OF THE MISSISSIPPI

Steamboating reached its peak during the 1850's. As many as 1,900 boats carrying supplies, livestock and passengers docked annually at the city's wharves. However, river traffic was interrupted by the ice of winter or ex-



Stephenson Courthouse, begun in 1836 and finished in 1838.



Early Chicago & Rock Island Railroad locomotive.

ceptionally low water in summer. So, the community enthusiastically celebrated the arrival of dependable transportation when the first train or "iron horse" rolled into Rock Island in 1854. The grand celebration, including speeches and fireworks, helped further publicize the city's economic possibilities. When the railroads realized that further expansion west would require bridging the Mississippi, they chose to do so at Rock Island, using Arsenal Island as a stepping stone.

The first bridge had eight fixed spans and a 286 foot swing span, at that time the longest swing span in the United States. Despite delays due to the difficulty of construction, the first passenger train crossed the bridge on April 22, 1856. Naturally, the steamboat and ferry companies objected strenuously to the bridge, which posed a competitive threat to their livelihood. They con-

tended the bridge was a navigational hazard, an argument fueled by an accident involving a bridge and a steamer, the *Effie Afton*. When 10 days after the opening of the bridge, the steamer struck a pier, caught fire and the fire spread to the bridge, the boatmen rested their case.

Abraham Lincoln and other attorneys

represented the railroads in the ensuing lawsuit. Although the railroads won, the bridge continued to cause accidents, and the riverboat men often called it "Hell's Gate" or the "Invention of Satan."

The impact of the railroads on Rock Island was immediate. The price of city land soared from 87.5 cents per acre in 1852, to \$5-\$10 per acre in 1853. On Illinois Street (now 2nd Avenue), land cost as much as \$75 per foot. Speculators, shrewd businessmen and immigrants alike realized the potential of a town that had both transportation advantages and also easily available, inexpensive water and coal power. Goods could be shipped on the railroad from Chicago or upriver from St. Louis and stored in Rock Island until they were moved by rail, boat or wagon to the fast developing communities in Iowa and beyond. Warehouses sprang up along the railway tracks, which were closer to the river, and the jobbing industry became a cornerstone of the city's financial success.



Rare picture of the first bridge across the Mississippi River, which was completed in 1856 to carry the railroad westward.

EXPLOSION OF COMMERCE

Some of the new settlers were southerners. A wealthy plantation owner, Charles Buford, arrived with his family from Kentucky in 1852, and



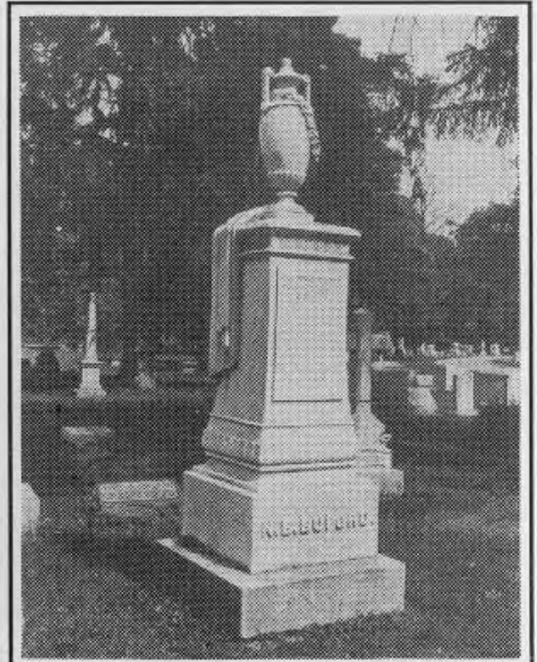
Looking north to the Mitchell & Lynde block, which is now the site of National City Bank. (From *Picturesque Tri-Cities*.)

quickly invested in the community. He built the first four story brick building downtown in 1854, founded by the Buford Plow company in 1856, and constructed a grandiose mansion on 7th Avenue, said to be worth \$10,000. This was a small fortune at a time when workers' wages were often only \$2 a week. (For Buford House, see [Spencer Place/19th Street Walking Tour](#).)

Buford was not the only Kentuckian to recognize the economic potential of Rock Island. Philemon Mitchell and Philander Cable arrived in 1856.

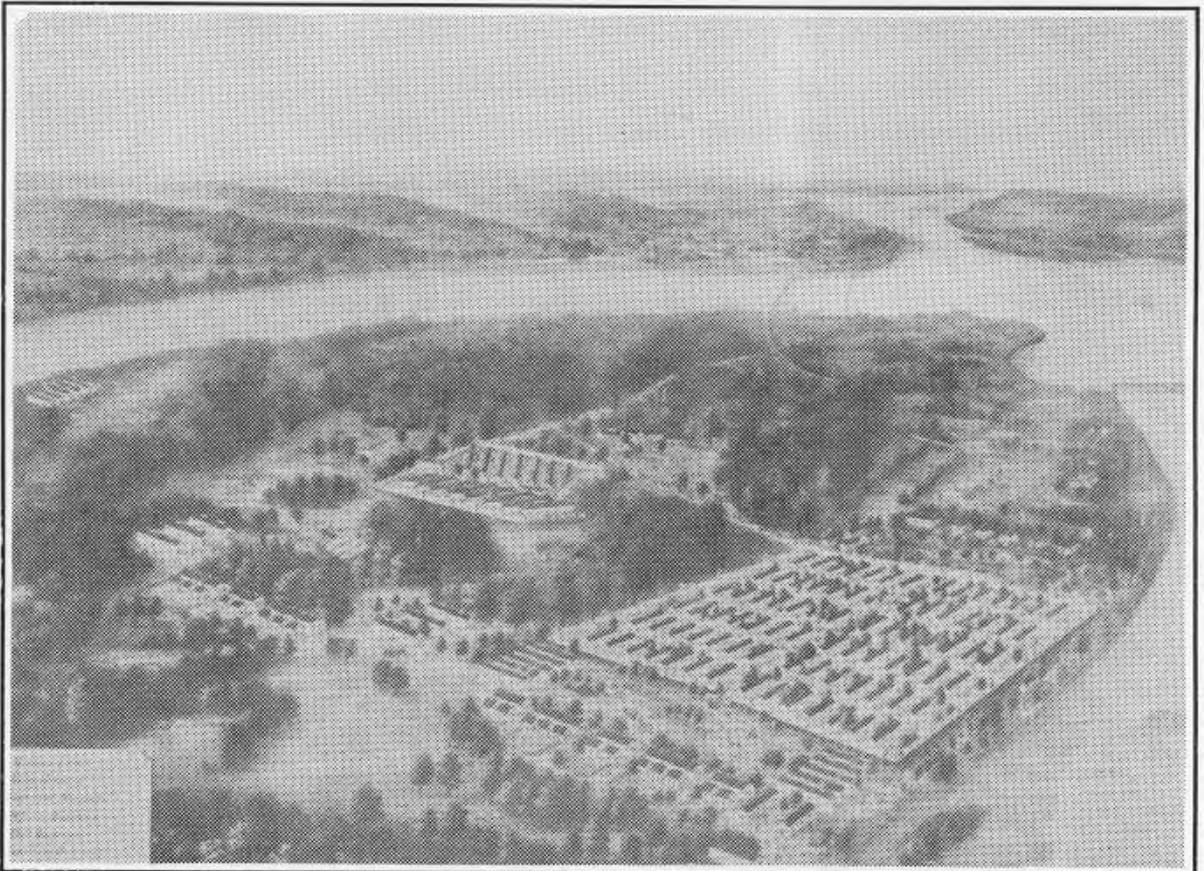
With the \$80,000 they had guarded with shotguns on the train all the way from Louisville, Kentucky, they purchased an existing bank. The two men survived the "Panic of 1857," bought out three failed banks, and eventually formed the First National Bank of Rock Island, now called National City Bank. (See [A Walking Tour of Western Downtown](#).) The Cables and Mitchells became prominent families in the city, invested heavily in railroads and other businesses, and were active in civic affairs. (See [Chicago Addition Walking Tour](#) and [A Walking Tour of Western Downtown](#).)

By 1860, when the census showed that Rock Island was the fifth largest city in Illinois, with a population of over 5,000, the community could boast of several other achievements. Rock Island



Col. John Buford's tombstone at Chippiannock. (Photo courtesy of Chippiannock Cemetery).

now offered free education at five schools, including a new high school that had risen from the ashes of its barely finished predecessor (Old Public School #4, built in 1892, is just east of this site); cultural opportunities, such as lectures, concerts, plays or membership in a small lending library for 75 cents a month; lodging at several hotels; a volunteer fire department; gas lighting; telegraph services and a daily newspaper. The nine established churches included one for Swedish and two for German-speaking immigrants, and burial could take place in a newly opened 60 acre cemetery called Chippiannock, an Indian word meaning "City of the Dead." The cemetery was added to the National Register of Historic Places in 1994.



Birdseye view of the Confederate prison at Rock Island Arsenal, circa 1863-1865. (Drawing from Picturesque Tri-Cities.)

CIVIL WAR AND CONFEDERATE PRISONERS

1860 was also an election year, and the issue of slavery deeply divided the citizens of Rock Island. Many of the city's leaders had southern roots and supported the pro-slavery. Democratic contender, Stephen Douglas, whose impassioned speech in the town square in 1860 helped him win Rock Island by 20 votes. The anti-slavery group, which supported the Republican party and Abraham Lincoln, included northerners and foreign born immigrants, who themselves had come to America to escape oppression.

With the onset of the Civil War, civic leaders called for unity. Within 10

days, the first company of over 120 volunteers was raised and the entire population of the city turned out to see the men leave by train for Springfield. Other companies were formed and by war's end 2,229 men had marched away — a remarkable effort considering the size of the county. Of that number, 226 did not return.

Their menfolk gone, some women in Rock Island, not unlike women throughout the nation, took over the running of the farms or small family businesses, with the county providing some financial assistance. Other women busied themselves sewing blankets and gathering supplies for the troops. Newspapers, with the help of the telegraph, kept the town informed and also published letters from local soldiers describing their experiences in the war.

When southern forces destroyed the United States Armory at Harper's Ferry in 1861, a group of local leaders lobbied successfully to have the new arsenal built on the same island where Fort Armstrong, now in ruins, had been erected over 40 years earlier. Work had barely begun in 1863, when the site was appropriated by the government for a Confederate prison camp. The prison area eventually contained 84 barracks, surrounded by a 12 foot fence.

Of the 12,192 Confederates who were sent to the camp, almost 2,000 died, from cholera and small pox epidemics, poor sanitary conditions or exposure to severe weather. Although 94 of the first 486 prisoners to arrive by train in December 1863 had smallpox, there was no hospital, and no attempt was made to isolate the sick until February of the following year. By then, many of the prisoners had died and over 1,000 were sick. Eventually a hospital was built, but filthy water, malnutrition, overcrowding and the lack of blankets and sufficient medical supplies continued to raise the death toll. Although conditions at Rock Island were never as terrible as those of the infamous prison for Union soldiers at Andersonville, Georgia, it does appear that allocated funds that could have been used to alleviate some of the problems were deliberately withheld. Records show that Col. William Hoffman, the commander of all the camps in the north, spent only \$87,000 on the inmates at Rock Island and returned some \$174,000 to the government at the end of the war.

After a local newspaper ran articles exposing these conditions, women with southern sympathies tried to lessen some of the hardships by distributing baskets of food, clothing and blankets. A prisoner with sufficient funds could also buy supplies from the local merchants who had built a wooden bridge from the city to the island. Trade with both prisoners and guards was profitable, and it was reported that one Rock Island grocer, A.C. Dart, made enough money from his visits to enable him, once the war was over, to erect a new three story building on 2nd Avenue to house the family business. (See Downtown Rock Island.)

Some families had divided loyalties. Whereas Charles Buford's wife was a tireless visitor to the prison camp, another Rock Island branch of the family

had sons that served with distinction as generals in the Union Army.

Napoleon Buford, who first visited the area in 1829 to map the Rock Island Rapids, was recognized for valor at Vicksburg and Belmont. His younger half-brother, John, distinguished himself at Gettysburg, where a statue commemorates his heroic actions.



A.C. Dart, Rock Island grocer, delivering supplies to Arsenal barracks during the Civil War. Dart is seated in the wagon.

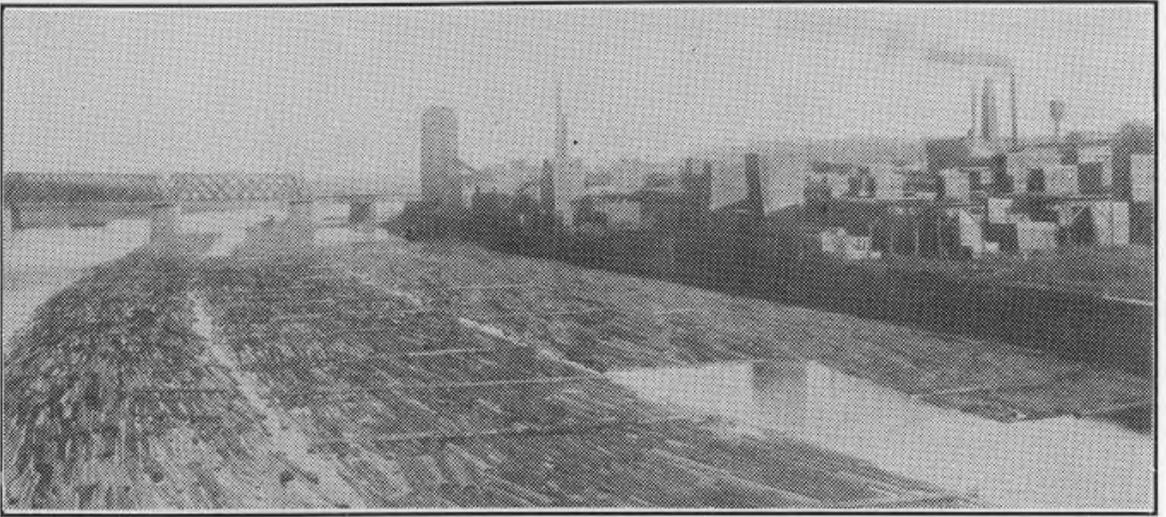
When peace was finally achieved, returning soldiers were feted with parades and speeches. Local residents raised \$10,000 and commissioned a former Rock Island resident, Leonard Wells Volk, to sculpt a fitting monument to the city's brave volunteers. The graceful memorial still stands in front of the present courthouse. (See [A Walking Tour of Western Downtown](#).)

Work on the Arsenal that had suffered delays because of the war, now progressed rapidly under a new commander, General Rodman, providing a steady income to Rock Island in the way of jobs and supplies. The general completely dismantled the prison camp, which is remembered now by a commemorative plaque and by the rows of graves in the Confederate Cemetery on the island.

LUMBER BARONS

Once the war was over, the city entered a new phase of growth. Transportation routes were re-opened, trade with the south resumed, and Rock Island could once again exploit its geographic advantages. Many businesses flourished, especially lumber and lumber related industries. Good wood was in constant demand as railroads continued to push west and new communities developed. A few mills had been in operation before the Civil War, but it was the inspired partnership of two German-born brothers-in-law, Fredrick Weyerhaeuser and Fredrick Denkmann, that made Rock Island a dominant force in the lumber industry for over 30 years.

Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann were an ideal team, whose talents complemented each other. Denkmann was a skilled machinist and tireless worker. He kept the mills in operation and perfected production techniques. Weyerhaeuser was a superb salesman who supervised the manufacturing aspects of the business. He organized the procurement of timber and the marketing of

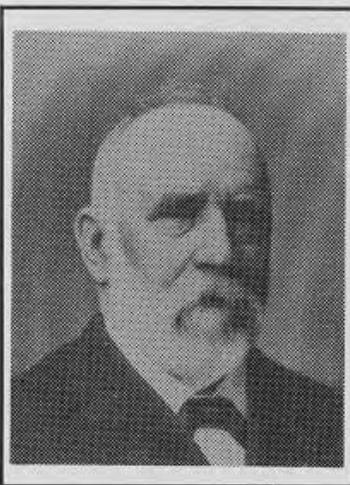


Rock Island Lumber Company, circa 1902. (From Picturesque Tri-Cities.)

lumber products.

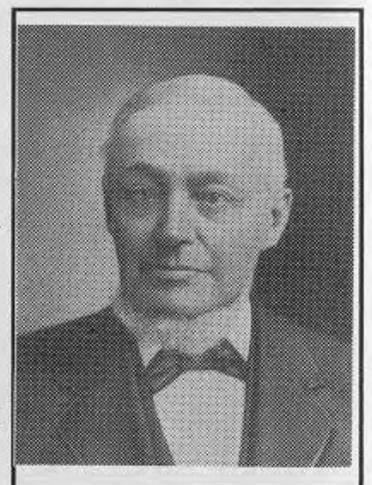
The Weyerhaeuser-Denkman partnership began in 1860 with the acquisition of a bankrupt mill in Rock Island. As they prospered they expanded, bought other financially troubled mills and then moved to solve the problem of finding enough lumber. When the eastern forests became depleted, lumbermen turned to the pineries of Wisconsin and Minnesota.

Once the rights to the trees were secured, the timber was cut and the logs stacked along the river banks during the winter months. When the spring thaw came, the timber was floated down the Mississippi in great log rafts to the mills. Competition was fierce, but Weyerhaeuser, who believed in cooperation rather than confrontation, formed the Mississippi River Association with 17 other logging companies. Together they streamlined the process of



Frederick Weyerhaeuser

getting logs from the forest to the mills, saving both time and money. The giant corporation soon controlled vast tracts of pine forests and employed 75 steamboats to push their large rafts down river. One raft in 1896 measured 1,560 feet by 296 feet, and had to be split in two in order to pass under the railroad bridge. When the rafts reached Rock Island, they were dismantled and the logs were kept in pens or booms



F.C.A. Denkmann

along the riverbanks until needed.

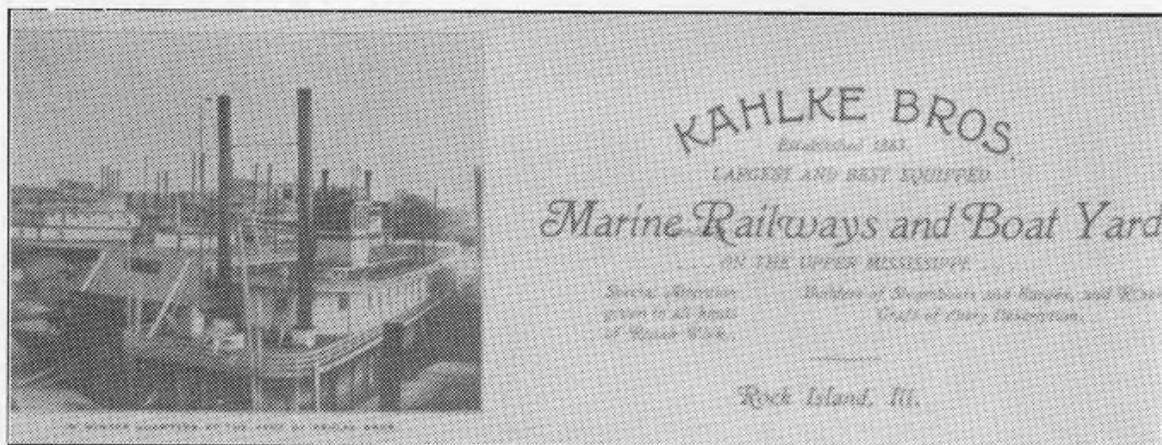
As the northern forests became depleted, the center of the lumber industry moved west and the Rock Island mills were too distant from the timber

supply. The last log was pulled from the river in 1905, and the last company-owned stores closed in 1970. Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann dissolved their partnership and incorporated in 1902. Family members still run the Weyerhaeuser Corporation, which today includes six major companies and 85 smaller companies.

The impact of the lumber industry on the growth and economy of Rock Island was enormous. Not only did the mills provide jobs, but the availability of good wood spawned many other wood-related businesses. Nine companies manufacturing such items as boats, farm implements, wagons, carriages, doors, brooms, and barrels sprang up and prospered. Such success attracted other manufacturers and merchants and increased the variety of available goods. This in turn encouraged the residents of outlying communities to do their shopping in Rock Island.

LATE 19th CENTURY EXPANSION AND PROSPERITY

A bird's eye view of Rock Island in the late 1880s shows that three distinct business districts had developed. All were grouped around the main arteries of transportation: the Mississippi River and the railroads. To the far west was Kahlke's Boatyard, which had grown from just two Kahlke brothers in 1867, to an operation that now did over \$440,000 worth of boat building and repairs and employed 50 men. Their most famous boat was the "Davenport" or "W.J. Quinlan," as it would later be called. This 112 foot stern-wheeler, built in 1901, was used as a ferry between Rock Island and Davenport until 1946. The family business continued well into the 20th century, switching to the construction of pleasure boats until the flood of 1965 closed the boatyard down permanently.



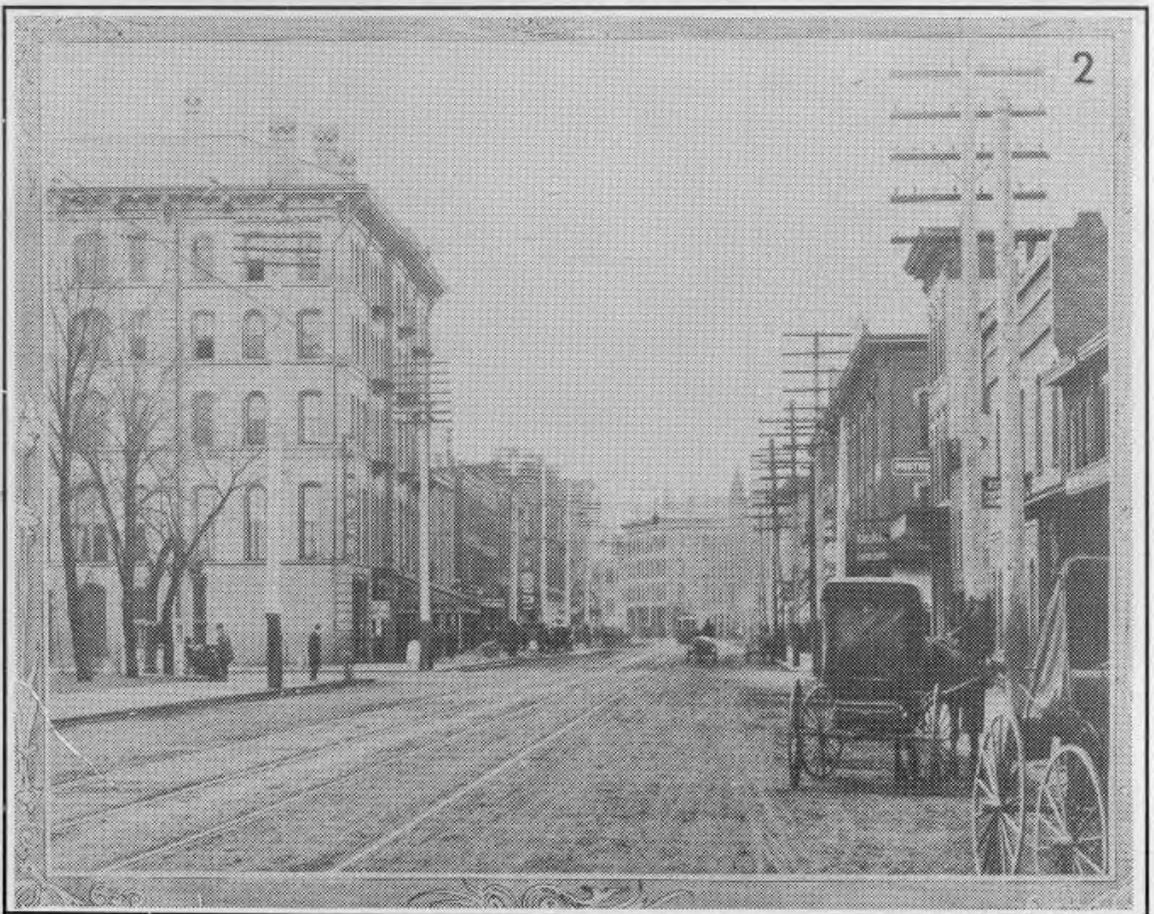
A Kahlke Boatyard advertisement.

Other west end companies included a Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann lumberyard and four manufacturers who proudly include the name of the city in their title. These were: Rock Island Plow Company (formerly Charles Buford's old agricultural company), Rock Island Stove Company, Rock Island Glass Works, and the Rock Island Brewing Company.

On the eastern side of town was the other large Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann concern, the Rock Island Lumber Company; Atlantic and Huber breweries; a bottling works and the roundhouse for the Chicago, Pacific and Rock Island Line. Reputed at the time to be the largest roundhouse in the world, it was the first great service center for engines after trains left Chicago.

The third commercial district developed on the site of the original town, roughly between present day 16th and 19th Streets, and 1st and 3rd Avenues. Stores that sold essentials, such as clothing, foodstuffs, furniture, drugs and hardware, shared this space with steam laundries, liquor dealers, harness and wagon makers, coal merchants, plumbers, dentists, and manufacturers of soaps, baby buggies, and cigars. This was also the home of banks, telegraph and express companies, hotels, offices, livery stables, restaurants, and public buildings because it was close to both the steamboat landings and railroad depots.

Although some of the early commercial district of downtown Rock Island has been demolished, reminders of the 1800-1900s remain along 2nd and 3rd Avenues between 15th and 19th Streets. Examples include the Star Block, the Bengston Building, and Panther Uniform, which retain some of the original architecture. Other structures like Dart's Block, the London Building or the Tremann Building, have undergone such extensive changes that only traces of the first construction can be seen. (See [A Walking Tour of Western Down-](#)



Second Avenue in Rock Island looking west from 19th Street. (From Picturesque Tri-Cities).

town and Downtown Rock Island.)

By 1888, 26 major companies and numerous smaller enterprises promoted their products in the City Directory or the various newspapers. As companies saw their profits increase, they moved to more spacious premises or enlarged and remodeled existing quarters. Some businesses, like McCabe's, moved three times before erecting a final large building on 3rd Avenue in 1900. The success of the store was largely due to widely advertised promotional sales that drew customers from over 100 miles away. McCabe's closed in 1985 after 115 years of continuous operation. (See Downtown Rock Island and KeyStone Neighborhood.)

272 Holland's Rock Island City Directory.

HENRY CARSE JOHN OHLWEILER

ESTABLISHED 1868

CARSE & OHLWEILER,
PROPRIETORS OF THE

Rock Island Bottling Works,
MANUFACTURERS OF

Soda & Mineral Waters.

—BOTTLETS OF AND DEALERS IN—

ALE, BEER, PORTER AND CHAMPAGNE CIDER.

Schlitz's Milwaukee
AND
Seipp's "Salvator"
EXPORT BEERS.

Works and Office, 425 Eleventh St., Rock Island, Ill.
TELEPHONE 66

Carse & Ohlweiler advertisement from the 1888 City Directory.

Newspaper advertising was common and rival stores, especially grocers, publicized their wares or services in glowing terms. Cristy's Crackers boasted of 40 different varieties of crackers, cakes, and biscuits. Henry Dart and Sons, whose business had expanded to include six traveling salesman, encouraged their patrons to buy dried fruits that were shipped from California daily, and Truesdale's reminded customers of their free delivery service to those who lived in town.

Many food shops stayed open from 6 a.m. to 10 p.m. Because families often did not have ready cash, some grocery stores extended credit to their regular patrons, entering their purchases in passbooks, and then tried to settle their accounts on a regular basis. In 1890, three loaves of bread cost a dime and nine cents bought a dozen eggs.

Aggressive marketing coupled with a wide variety of available goods, attracted out of town trade and helped stores double or triple their sales. The Rock Island Stove Company, for example, sold 205 stoves in 1871, 540 stoves in 1872, and by 1890 claimed to have sales of 20,000 Riverside Ranges annually. One of their slogans was: "Riverside Ranges are quick bakers, Riverside Ranges are winter chargers."

Small wonder that visitors to the city might elect to stay and start their own businesses. This happened to Roy Bowlby, who came to settle a claim on a house in Rock Island in 1877, and decided to settle and open a music store instead. Within a decade his traveling salesman were selling organs and pianos in almost 150 towns in Iowa and Illinois. Although no longer a family business, the Bowlby Music Store still operates on 2nd Avenue. (See A Walk-

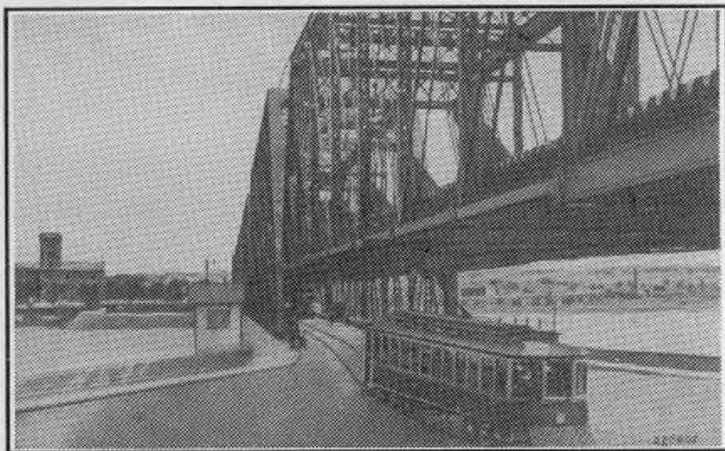
ing Tour of Western Downtown.)

Although lumber had been the catalyst for the economic boom, it was the improvement in transportation systems that made this growth possible. The successful use of trains to ship troops and supplies during the Civil War highlighted the need to expand the railroad system. Businessmen now pushed for more and more tracks on which to ship goods between established communities and to new settlements.

Rock Island had the early advantage of the first bridge across the Mississippi and successive town leaders encouraged railway companies to make the city a major stop on both their passenger and freight lines. By 1876, three trunk lines, the Chicago, Pacific, and Rock Island Line; the Chicago, Burlington and St. Paul Line; and the Chicago, Burlington, and Quincy Line converged on Rock Island. The tracks ran along 1st Avenue so that passengers, who disembarked at downtown depots were close to hotels, business and shopping districts and boat landings. Manufacturers whose land abutted the railway lines could load or receive freight at the edge of their premises.

Despite extensive repairs, it was soon obvious that the first railroad bridge could no longer handle the increased size and number of trains. The old bridge had cut the Arsenal in half and the U.S. government, who owned the island, agreed to share the expense of construction if the new bridge was located further downstream.

When the bridge opened in 1872, it was the first double-decker bridge across the Mississippi. A wagon road ran beneath the railroad tracks and the speed limit on the bridge was 6 m.p.h. Within a year, telephone companies had attached wires to special towers on the structure and phone service was established between Rock Island and Davenport.



Street car below and train above were accommodated on the Government bridge. (Circa 1925).

Branch lines connected Rock Island with other nearby towns, and in the 1890s, it was estimated that everyday 36 passenger trains passed through the city, and approximately 300 freight cars were loaded for shipment across America. Indeed, by the 20th century, Rock Island, in conjunction with nearby Davenport and Moline, had become one of the major distribution centers west of Chicago.

In 1901, the Renaissance Revival-style Rock Island Lines Depot was built to serve passengers for the Chicago, Rock Island & Pacific Railway Company. This facility served as the Regional Operations Headquarters. Trains carry-

ing freight, passengers and mail would depart daily from Rock Island. The famed Rocket Line would later make the three-hour run to Chicago taking passengers to and from this growing metropolis. During the 1950s and 1960s, passenger service declined and the last passenger train left the Depot on May 31, 1978. The Depot's exterior was restored by the City of Rock Island in 1997 through state and federal transportation grants.

After 25 years of use, the double-decker bridge was replaced by a structure that could handle double tracks on both levels, as well as heavier locomotives and larger passenger and freight cars. Erected on the foundation of the 1872 bridge, the 1896 bridge is still in use today. The Crescent Railway Bridge was built in 1899, but Rock Islanders had to wait until the Centennial Bridge at 15th Street was opened in 1940 for another direct way to cross the river. Built by the City of Rock Island, the Centennial Bridge was the first four lane bridge across the Mississippi. (See [A Walking Tour of Western Downtown and Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture](#).)

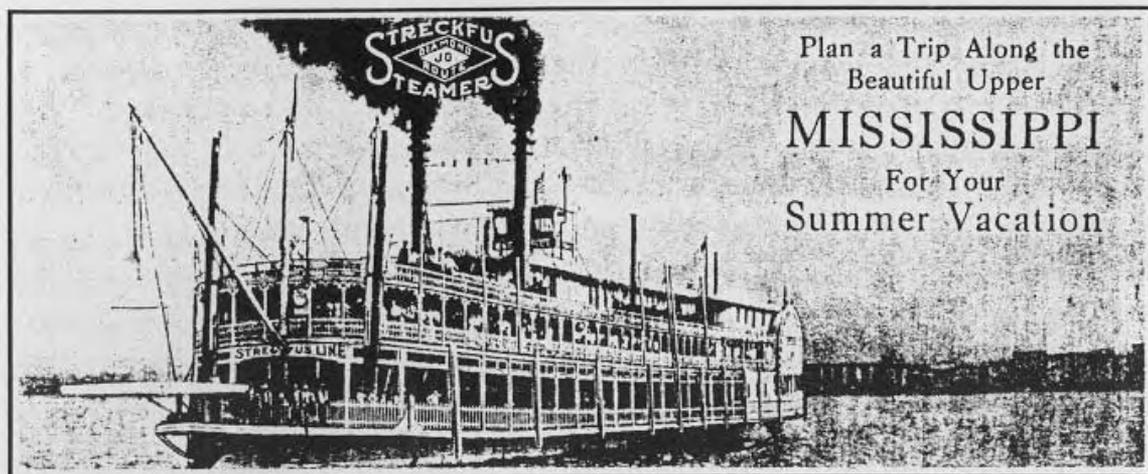
The great "highway," the Mississippi, began to decline in importance as railroads grew and the logging industry moved west. Steamboats still moved goods up and down the river, but they could not match the speed or directness of trains and their reliability was hampered by mechanical problems, especially boiler explosions, winter ice and the difficulty of negotiating bridges and rapids. The average life of a steamboat was about five years. Nevertheless, in 1888 the two major steamboat companies on the Mississippi made over 2,000 stops in Rock Island and handled some 1,000 tons of freight.

NAVIGATING THE MISSISSIPPI

Improvements to the Rock Island Rapids had been slow in coming. Although the main channel had been straightened and given more depth after the Civil War, the dangerous currents still necessitated the use of a pilot. This often created a bottleneck above and below the rapids. As log rafts disappeared and barges replaced steamboats, it was evident that if river traffic were to stay competitive with the railroads, the channel would have to be deepened again.

A series of 26 locks and dams were built on the upper Mississippi from 1931-1939 to create a nine foot channel. When the last lock was completed, the threat of the Rock Island Rapids was finally controlled. River improvements however, did not alter the fact that the nation needed to move goods from east to west, whereas the Mississippi flowed from north to south. It was only during the latter half of the 20th century that the river once again became the preferred transportation route for certain freight. Grain products, such as corn, wheat, and oats are sent downriver, and coal, oil and building materials are shipped upriver. Today, the swing span of the Crescent Railroad Bridge is open continually, mute testimony to the rise of river traffic and the decline of railroad services.

When the railroad companies cut into their trade, some steamboat opera-



Streckfus Steamers luxury riverboat cruises were very popular along the Mississippi. Here is a brochure cover for the Diamond Jo route, which ran between St. Louis and St. Paul.

tors began to offer excursion trips on their packet boats. None was more successful in the tourist trade than the Streckfus family of Rock Island. John Streckfus began his passenger and freight service in 1884 and his business prospered because his boats were fast and always on time.

To offset losses to the railroads, Streckfus began to convert his boats into cruise ships, and in 1901, he built a steamboat exclusively for pleasure. Called the J.S. (Streckfus had an aversion to long names), it was 175 feet long with four decks, electric lights and a large dance floor. The J.S. was one of the most popular boats on the Mississippi until it burned in 1910. A year later, the Streckfus family bought out a major steamboat line and moved their base to St. Louis. The Streckfus boats however, continued to make stops in the area. By 1914 the Streckfus Company had the largest fleet of pleasure boats on the Mississippi.

John Streckfus loved music and hired many well known Dixieland bands to perform on his cruise ships. Louis Armstrong recalled joining a Streckfus boat several times to play in the band, and once it was reported that Captain Streckfus wanted to fire a coronet player who seemed unable to read music. That coronet player was Bix Beiderbecke. The old Streckfus family home at 908 4th Avenue has been restored and designated a Rock Island Landmark. (See [Chicago Addition Walking Tour](#).)

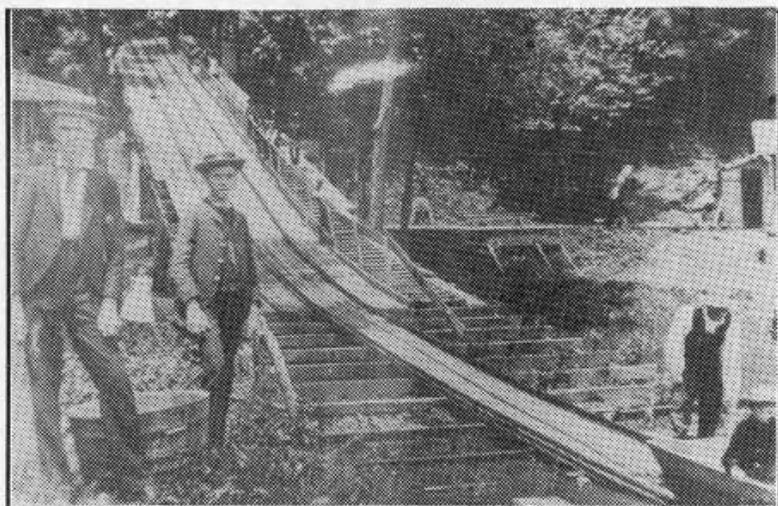
IMPROVED SERVICES AND ENTERTAINMENT

Travel within the city also began to improve when a new horse-drawn streetcar service was organized between Rock Island and Moline in 1868. Other street railway lines were built to connect different sections to outlying districts. The charge was generally 5 cents for travel within the city, and 10 cents to go between towns.

In 1888 a Chicago company bought out the Rock Island and Davenport lines and began to modernize the system. Horse-drawn cars were replaced by electric trolleys and it became fashionable to rent open-air cars for evening

parties. Control of all the lines on either side of the river then passed to a group of local businessmen who renovated the tracks and issued tickets that could be used on all of the lines. The new owners also developed amusement parks outside Rock Island and Moline to encourage the use of street cars on the weekends and evenings.

The Rock Island amusement park was situated on the bluffs above the Rock River at the site of the former Sauk summer village, and was appropriately called Black Hawk's Watchtower, or later simply Watchtower Park. The original developer of the park was Bailey Davenport, who had inherited the land from his father, George

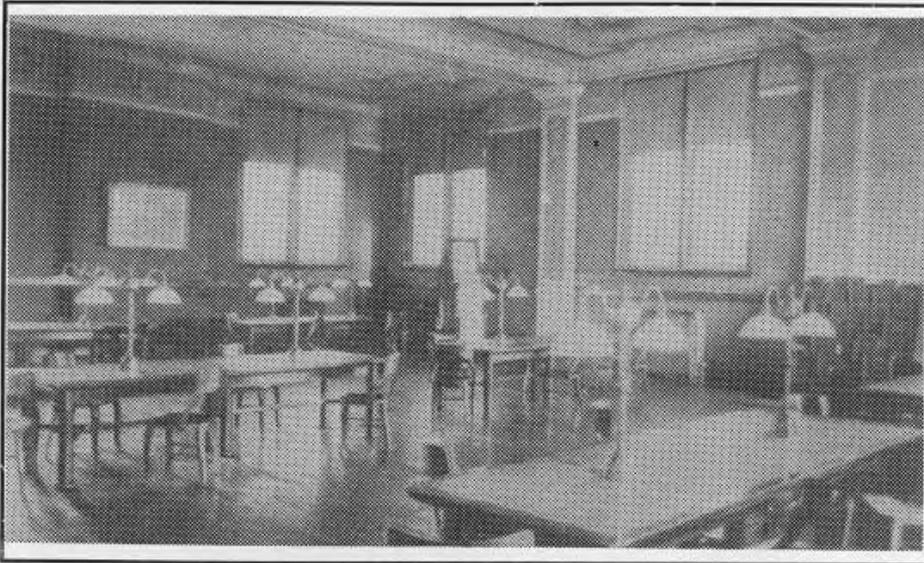


"Shoot the Chutes" was a popular attraction at Watchtower Park.

Davenport. Bailey astutely built a horse streetcar line from downtown Rock Island to his "public pleasure spot," which featured picnic areas, walking trails and healthful mineral springs.

After Bailey's death, Watchtower Park was bought by the Davenport and Rock Island Railway Company, and soon became a well-known amusement park that attracted thousands of out of town visitors, as well as local citizens. Entertainment was geared to all ages and included rides, concerts, variety shows and dinner and dancing in a lavishly decorated pavilion. The most popular attraction was a toboggan slide that plunged 100 feet down the bluff face into the Rock Island River. It was called "Shoot the Chutes" and was the first of its kind in America. At the height of its popularity, over 50,000 people passed through the gates of Watchtower Park each summer. The entry fee, which included a round trip ticket on the streetcar, was 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for children. By the 1920s, automobiles and motorized buses had caused a steady decline in the use of streetcars and the park was no longer profitable. When the land was put up for sale, a citizen's group successfully lobbied the state legislature to appropriate sufficient funds to buy the property and make a public park. The area is now called Black Hawk State Historic Site, and houses a fine museum dedicated to Native American artifacts and life.

Economic growth and prosperity in Rock Island during the post-Civil War era was matched with substantial improvements in both public services and in the actual appearance of the city itself. Electric street lights replaced gas lamps in 1882, the same year Edison opened the famous Pearl Street Electric Station in New York City. Five years after Alexander Graham Bell in-



Interior view of the reading room of the Rock Island Public Library shortly after completion of the building in 1903.

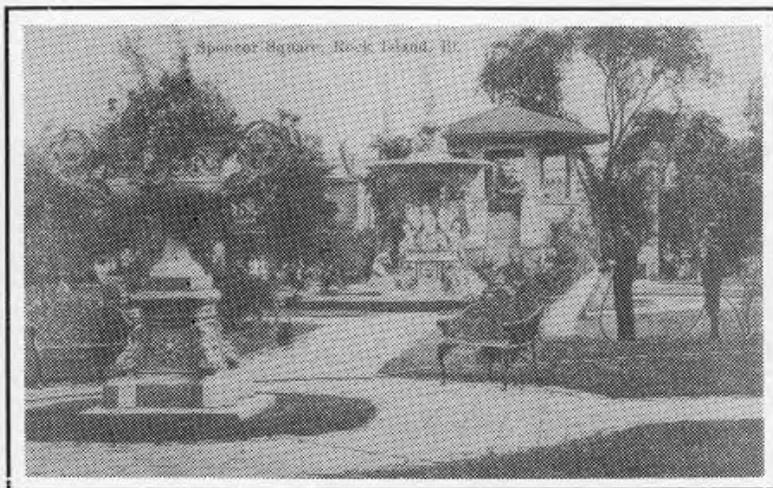
vented the telephone in 1876, there were 100 phone subscribers in Rock Island. A new ten-room hospital admitted its first patient in 1893, and a few years later a home for orphans was opened. The public library that kept outgrowing its rented rooms finally received a magnificent permanent home in a building that was generously funded by Frederick Weyerhaeuser. (See Downtown Rock Island.) Boats brought mail on a daily basis by 1862 and free delivery was offered to Rock Island residents in 1888. The newly created police and fire departments had paid staff rather than volunteer members, up to date equipment and uniforms. A new pumping station and reservoir were built on the bluffs and water mains and sewage systems were gradually extended to all parts of the city.

In 1876, following a visit by several aldermen to the World's Fair in Philadelphia, Rock Island adopted the orderly system of street numbering. Instead of colorful, but sometimes confusing titles (one road had six different names), north-south thoroughfares became streets and east-west roads became avenues. Illinois Street was now 2nd Avenue, and Jefferson and Cherry became 19th Street.

The World's Fair, which celebrated the centennial of American independence, ushered in a national feeling of pride in home and community. Rock Island responded by forming the Citizen's improvement Association. This group of some 100 influential businessmen, began to exert pressure on the City Council to pave roads and sidewalks, demolish undesirable buildings to enhance the appearance of the city.

Special taxes were assessed and used first to brick the commercial section of 2nd Avenue. This success (several new businesses moved to the area), led to the paving of other streets and the construction of solid and uniform sidewalks in the downtown district.

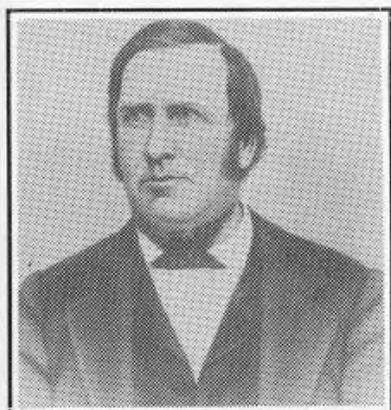
The Association now pressed for the creation of a park system and chose the renovation of a swampy piece of land in the center of town called Spencer Square as their first project. Neglected for years, and subject to frequent flooding, the square was a public eyesore. The first park commissioner,



Spencer Square.

William Jackson, who served without pay, drew up plans for the renovation work and solicited donations to beautify the park. When it opened, the central fountain, benches and statues were proof of the generosity and concern of many business and civic leaders.

Spencer Square remained a showplace for many years, but as residential areas moved south, the park was used less frequently and began to deteriorate. In 1954, despite objections, the land was sold to the United States government, and became the site of a new post office.

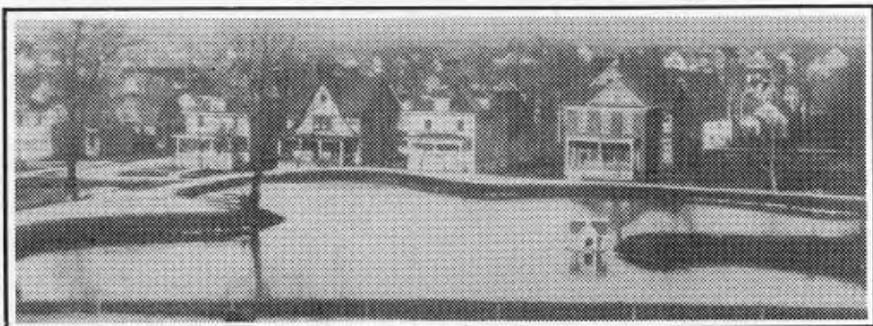


Bailey Davenport.

Other riverfront vicinity parks were renovated. Then the park board began work on a 40 acre tract of land on the bluffs that belonged to Bailey Davenport. Bailey had amassed considerable real estate, much of which he refused to sell during his lifetime. At his death, Bailey's property was put up for auction, and the area known as Bailey's Pastures was bought by four local businessmen. These men, in turn, donated the land to the city for use as a public park, later named Longview. The establishment of the park spurred development of the properties to the immediate north and west, which

became known in the 1990s as the Longview Historic Area.

The cost of developing Longview Park was another example of cooperation between the city and its citizens. The \$125,000 donated by residents was matched by the City Council. A nationally known landscape artist from Chicago, O.C. Simonds, was hired. His plans included emphasizing and enhancing the natural beauty of the site and the construction of two lagoons. When Longview was officially opened in 1908, merchants closed their doors and an



The lagoon at the northeast corner of Longview Park was once a popular attraction. Fine residences are located just across the avenue.

estimated 15,000 people attended the dedication ceremonies.

One other large park was added to the park system in 1909. It too, was largely the result of public pressure on City Council to buy land that would otherwise have been snapped up by real estate developers. The 23 acre park was called Lincoln Park to honor the 100th anniversary of Abraham Lincoln's birth. (See [KeyStone Neighborhood](#).)

RESIDENTIAL EXPANSION

This period of growth and renewal was also marked by the emergence of new residential areas to the southeast of downtown Rock Island. Merchants and businessmen who now felt economically secure, bought lots on present 17th-23rd Streets between 6th and 13th Avenues. Their houses, built mostly between 1860 and 1936, reflect many different architectural styles.



This is a circa 1900 photograph taken of the Edward D. Sweeney House at 816 20th Street in the Broadway Historic District. Sweeney was a prominent attorney and businessman. He had the honor of giving the Oration at the 1895 dedication of the Rock Island County Courthouse. (From [Picturesque Tri-Cities](#)).

The names of the original owners include families who settled early and helped make the city prosperous. This part of town is now known as the Broadway Historic District, and includes several homes listed individually in the National Register of Historic Places. The entire Broadway neighborhood itself was added to the National Register in 1998. (For detailed information on these residential areas, see [Spencer Place/19th Street, 20th Street Walking Tour](#) and [22nd and 23rd Streets Walking Tour](#).)

As more room was needed for residential housing, affluent citizens were forced to move east or up on the bluffs. In 1895, a new four square block area on the top of the hill above the Broadway Historic District and close to Longview Park was developed by Frank Kelly. The area is the locally designated Highland Park Historic District with homes dating from 1895 to 1928.

A nearby estate belonged to Susanne Denkmann, youngest daughter of lumber baron F.C.A. Denkmann, and her lawyer husband, John Hauberg. The Spencer-designed 20 room mansion belongs to the Prairie School style of architecture associated with famous Chicago architect Frank Lloyd Wright. The beautiful grounds of the ten acre property were laid out by Jens Jensen, also of Chicago, and one of the foremost landscape artists of his day. The Denkmann-Hauberg House was later donated to the city for use as a civic

center. (See [Highland Park Historic District Walking Tour](#).)



George Stauduhar at work.
(Photo courtesy of Rock Island
Preservation Society).

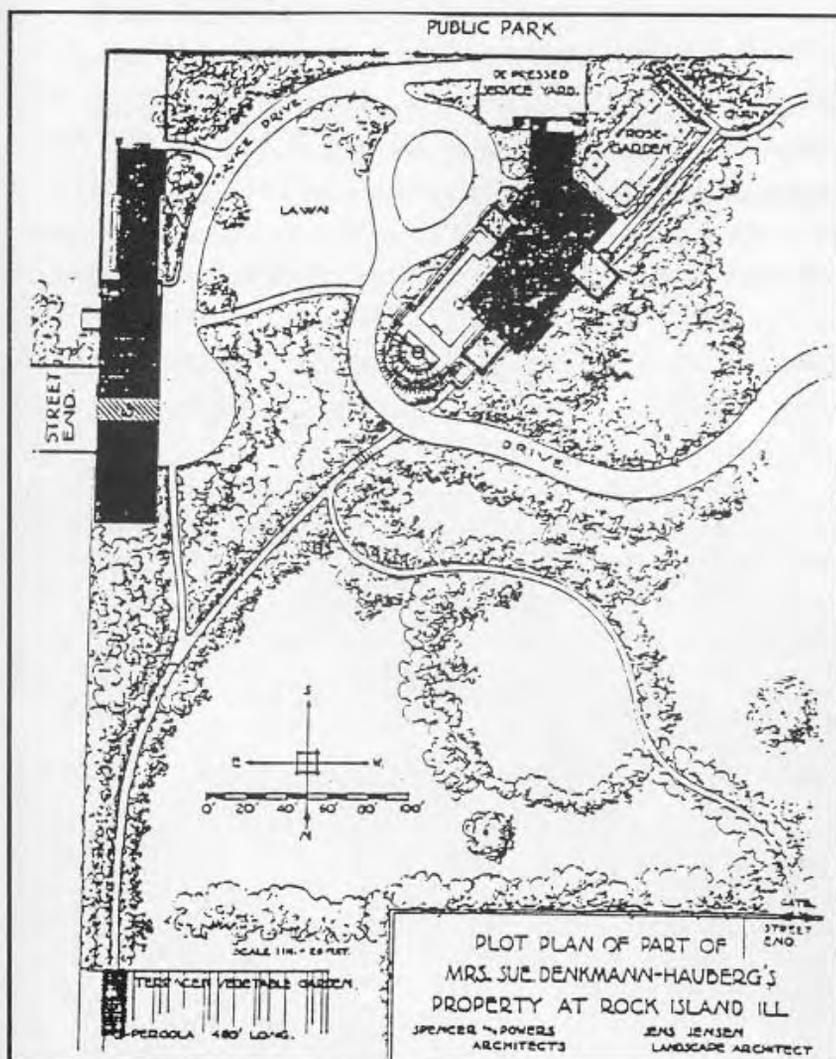
At least five of the buildings in Highland Park were designed by George Stauduhar, including the house he built for himself. Stauduhar, a noted architect, practiced in Rock Island from 1890-1928, and left a legacy of many churches, commercial buildings, schools, fire stations and attractive residences in Rock Island County.

Stauduhar's most imposing structure on the bluff is the Villa de Chantal. Begun in 1900 for the Sisters of the Visitation, the Stauduhar buildings eventually included the convent, the school, a chapel and chaplain's bungalow. The girls school operated from 1901-1975, and counted among its pupils the daughters of many of the city's most influential citizens.

The extensive landscaping of the nine acre property was supervised by Alling de Forest of Rochester,

New York. (See [Highland Park Historic District Walking Tour](#).)

The presence of three nationally known landscape architects at work in the city, Simonds at Longview park, Jensen at the Denkmann-Hauberg House and de Forest at the Villa de Chantal, shows the importance the residents of Rock Island attached to the scenic beauty of their town. In all, a total of nearly 60 acres along the bluff top were professionally landscaped from 1902-1911, a feat that has not been duplicated since that time.



Jens Jensen's landscape plans for the Hauberg Estate. The Prairie-themed landscape setting was designed to blend with the house's architecture.
(Drawing courtesy of Hauberg Civic Center).

These open space bluff tops can even be extended further to the east. The old Huber estate (now Saint Mary of the Angels Convent), Augustana College and Lincoln Park tie in this irregular line of open acreage all the way to 42nd Street. Lincoln Park is the hilltop location of the KeyStone neighborhood, which was a utopian development scheme marketed by E.H. Guyer in the 1890s. While the development was not fully realized, the reorganized KeyStone neighborhood today pays homage to the past through housing developments in Edgewood Park, Columbia Park, Fairview, Brooks' Grove, College Heights and Park View. (See KeyStone Neighborhood and Park View brochures.)

ETHNIC DIVERSITY

As wave after wave of immigrants fled their homelands for the freedom and opportunity of America, they looked west and moved from the eastern seaboard to the new frontier towns. The first Belgians and Swedes settled on Arsenal Island. When the United States Government bought the land to build the Arsenal, all residents of the island were evicted and forced to move across the river to Iowa or Illinois. Many of the Swedes and Belgians chose to farm the rich lands of Rock Island County, or live in the city itself.

Their success attracted others and soon there were distinct ethnic districts in the city which provided valuable support systems and fellowship for its members. The Belgians congregated up on top of the hill along 18th Avenue, or in the west end of town. Here they built churches and recreation centers, where they spoke their native tongue and practiced their beliefs and traditions.

The Swedes also built churches and opened a few schools, where classes were conducted in Swedish. Their most lasting contribution to education in Rock Island was the opening of Augustana College in 1875. Originally a seminary to train

Lutheran ministers, the college expanded its curriculum and awarded its first Bachelor of Arts degree in 1877. As the years have passed, Augustana has grown from one all purpose brick building to an extensive campus of beautifully designed landscape and buildings. These include a planetarium, a



May 16, 1900: Augustana College is the scene of a funeral procession for Olof Olsson, the Swedish Lutheran school's third president.

large auditorium and new, multi-million dollar library and science buildings, which are a lasting memorial to an immigrant people's dream.

Another ethnic group was of German origin. They had German-speaking churches and schools and published two German newspapers. Their recreational center was a Turn Gemeinde or Turner Society, situated first on 2nd Avenue and later on 3rd Avenue. Here they did calisthenics, had dances and songfests and enjoyed a keg of beer. Many German immigrants, like Weyerhaeuser and Denkmann, became successful businessmen who donated their time and talents to the betterment of the community.

Two other prominent German citizens were George Wagner and Ignatz Huber. They came to Rock Island in the 1850s and bought into existing breweries. When they merged to form Rock Island Brewing Company in 1892, they had a virtual monopoly of locally brewed beers, producing some 40,000 barrels a year. Although the company survived the years of prohibition by manufacturing "near beers," it could not compete with nationally known manufacturers such as Schlitz and Anheuser-Busch, and the breweries were dismantled in the 1930s.

Both the Huber and Wagner families built lavish homes, first downtown near their businesses and later in prime residential areas. The Huber mansion was demolished in 1986, but Robert Wagner's imposing house still stands on 23rd Street. (See [22nd and 23rd Streets Walking Tour](#).)

There were ethnic ties to many other Rock Island historic churches and neighborhoods. St. Mary's Catholic Church has ties to both Irish and German communities. The Swedish Zion Lutheran Church conducted services solely in Swedish until after World War I. (See [KeyStone Neighborhood](#).) The Greenbush neighborhood, located between 24th and 30th Streets and 5th and 9th Avenues, was historically occupied by many Irish families. In the 1910s and 1920s, Jewish families settled in the Douglas Park neighborhood, particularly along 9th Street. That area is now largely African-American. Many Swedes settled around Augustana College in KeyStone, but the Columbia Park Addition of KeyStone now contains Rock Island's largest concentration of Hispanic families. (See [KeyStone Neighborhood](#) and [Park View](#).)

TURN OF THE CENTURY ACTIVITIES

Although many citizens worked six days a week, they also found time to participate in a variety of recreational activities. From the earliest years, Rock Islanders attended debates, lectures and performances by visiting theatrical companies. Ralph Waldo Emerson and Clara Barton and later, Booker T. Washington all gave well attended speeches in downtown halls. When Harper's Opera House opened in 1878, patrons were treated to shows featuring noted performers of the day, such as Sarah Bernhardt, Lily Langtry and Buffalo Bill. Although tickets cost as much as \$2.50 in the 1880s, equivalent to 2 days wages at the time, the 850 seat theater was usually filled to capacity.

Harper's Theatre, however, could not compete with the advent of silent movies and closed in 1901. As the popularity of silent movies grew, existing buildings were converted into movie houses and new theaters were built. From 1900-1940 some 20 theaters opened and closed within the city limits. One downtown movie house that survived is the Fort Theatre, now a dinner theater called Circa '21. The theater still retains its original terra cotta decorations both inside and out, depicting an Indian and Prairie theme. (See Downtown Rock Island Walking Tour and Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture.)

Other recreational pastimes included croquet, lawn bowling, trap shooting, horse racing, swimming and baseball in the summer; roller skating in an indoor rink, ice skating, tobogganing, sleigh rides and football in winter. Circuses unloaded regularly from the trains and paraded through town. Carnivals, open air concerts, fireworks displays, boat rides and trips to Watchtower amusement park were popular attractions. Newly organized service clubs such as the Elks, Moose, and the Rock Island Woman's Club, offered fellowship, culture and opportunities for social action.

Harper's Theatre!

Thursday Night, August 30, 1883

SPECIAL ENGAGEMENT
—OF THE—

EMMA ABBOTT

—GRAND—
ENGLISH OPERA CO.
"The Largest, Strongest, Most Successful English
Opera Company in America."

WETHERELL & PRATT, . . . DIRECTORS.

THIS EVENING AT 8 O'CLOCK.
DONIZETTI'S ROMANTIC OPERA.

Linda di Chamouni
(THE PEARL OF SAVOY.)

IN THREE ACTS.

Linda	EMMA ABBOTT
Pieroto	ZELDA SEGUIN
Madalina	MARIE HINDLE
Rossini	MISS ELLERINGTON
Gianetta	MISS SCHULLER
Marquis de Bois Fleury	WALTER ALLEN
Pierrot	WM. BODERICK
Pierre	WM. CONNELL
Franz	H. HARVEY
Phœnix	ROBT WARD
Antonio	SIG. P. TAGLIEPETRA
Carlo	VALENTINE FABRINI

Grand Chorus and Orchestra.

MUSICAL DIRECTOR, . . . J. H. ROSEWALD
STAGE MANAGER, . . . WALTER ALLEN

An 1883 playbill from Harper's Theatre advertising the grand opera.

The Circus Parade travels down 2nd Avenue.



The needs of the poor had become a national concern by the turn of the century. The City of Rock Island had always made some provision for the poor in the community. As early as 1897 they organized the Associated Char-



Susanne Denkmann Hauberg was very active in the social issues of her day, especially the West End Settlement. (Photo courtesy of Hauberg Civic Center).

ities in an attempt to coordinate efforts to help the needy. Inspired by the work of Jane Addams, who had established the Hull House in 1889 to minister to the poor, civic leaders opened the West End Settlement on 5th Street and 7th Avenue in 1909. This two story brick building, which included a free kindergarten, gymnasium, and clinic for crippled children, was the gift of Susanne Denkmann, who had seen such settlements operate while she taught in a slum area in New York City. The West End Settlement, like Hull House, was a pioneer attempt to provide social services to the poor before

any welfare system existed in America. The Craftsman-style building still stands on 7th Avenue.

THE INFAMOUS JOHN LOONEY

But the turn of the century brought more to Rock Island than vaudeville shows and concern for social action. In fact, one ruthless newcomer, John Looney, cast such a shadow over the city during his 20 year criminal reign, that it was some time before Rock Islanders regained their sense of civic pride.

Looney came to Rock Island in 1887 to work for Western Union. He also studied law and was admitted to the bar in 1889. Seven years later, Looney and his law partner were charged with conspiracy and fraud, but Looney's friendships with influential officials resulted in over-turned convictions and the case was never re-tried.

From then on, Looney used his expertise to coerce, blackmail or buy his way into virtually every department of local government. This strategy enabled Looney to engage in many illegal activities (it was claimed Looney had a hand in every tavern, gambling operation and prostitution service in the city), and still successfully fight all accusations of wrongdoing in the courts.

One of Looney's strongest weapons was his newspaper, the Rock Island News. Billed as a "moral newspaper," the News was actually a scandal sheet used by Looney to attack and blackmail many prominent citizens of Rock Island. The victim was told a compromising story would appear in the next edition of the News unless a fee was paid to the editors of the paper; generally,

The mayor declared the riots were the work of hoodlums and that the true spirit of the city was demonstrated by the \$125,000 raised during the week after the riots to build a new YMCA. Although Looney was convicted for misuse of the United States mail, fined and ordered to cease the publication of the News, no one was charged for the destruction of property or deaths resulting from the riots.

Looney temporarily retreated to his ranch in New Mexico, but returned to Rock Island in 1917 and quickly regained control of all his former illegal operations. It was an opportune time for a man of Looney's abilities. America had gone to war and the energies of most Rock Islanders were focused on the war effort.

Like other Americans all over the nation, citizens supported Red Cross and other appeals, bought Liberty Bonds and worried about their men at the front. To ease the housing shortage created by the rise in employment at the



Architect Olof Cervin and contractor Henry Horst constructed 217 houses for Arsenal workers in 105 days. (Photo courtesy of Augustana College Special Collections).

Arsenal, Olof Cervin, a well-known local architect, built 217 federally funded residential units in Rock Island. (See [A Walking Tour of 1918 Government Housing](#).)

Peace was declared in 1918 and Rock Island celebrated loudly and wholeheartedly. The following year saw residents struggling with inflation and prolonged strikes by telephone and trolley employees giving little thought to the growing problems of drinking, gambling, and prostitution that were engulfing the city.

When ratification of the 18th amendment to the United States Constitution brought nationwide prohibition, it did not have much effect on the population of Rock Island. Although newspapers carried almost daily stories of raids by federal agents, bootleggers continued to operate, often aided by crooked officials and members of Looney's gang. The gangster's control over the city was now almost complete and his henchmen included the police chief, the city attorney and even his old enemy, former mayor, Henry Schriver.

John Looney's activities helped give the city such a reputation for lawlessness that famed evangelist, Billy Sunday, came to Rock Island in 1919 to conduct a seven week long revivalist campaign. Calling the city a "citadel of sin," Sunday rallied against the vices of lust and liquor. A special target of Sunday's wrath was John Looney, who Sunday felt was most responsible for providing these temptations. The evangelist's fiery blasts made many converts and raised \$50,000 in donations, but it did not stop the city's appetite for drinking and gambling or the activities of Looney and his gang.

Then, in 1922, a Rock Island tavern owner, Bill Gabel, was gunned down while on his way to deliver incriminating evidence about Looney to federal authorities. The public was outraged and local residents raised \$35,000 to "clean up Rock Island." A few months later, Looney narrowly escaped death when a former lieutenant turned enemy, and decided to challenge the gangster's power. The shoot-out took place at the intersection of 17th Street and 3rd Avenue, and resulted in the death of Looney's 22 year old son, Connor. Realizing his hold on the city was broken, Looney fled Rock Island to avoid prosecution for Gabel's murder.

Three years later, he was apprehended in New Mexico, tried, convicted, and sentenced to 14 years at the State Penitentiary at Joliet.

ROARING TWENTIES

Looney's fall was a sign that the city was ready to take steps to overcome its unsavory notoriety. Action was taken against those who had helped Looney establish his empire and many top officials were removed from office. Although the Argus still carried accounts of raids by federal agents (Prohibition continued until 1933), the newspaper also reminded readers of positive events that were happening during the "Roaring Twenties."

Eight new industries, including Servus Rubber, opened in Rock Island in 1923. Employment was up, wages had risen and residents were enjoying the general prosperity that followed the post-war slump. A highly visible sign of this renewal of faith in the community was the over \$450,000 raised by citizens in seven days to build the Fort Armstrong, a 160 room hotel on 3rd Avenue. (See Downtown Rock Island Walking Tour.)

Listening to the radio was a fascinating new experience of this era. When WHBF began broadcasting in 1927 from a makeshift studio on the third floor of a downtown building, Rock Islanders enjoyed both local and national programs. To accommodate the addition of a television station in 1950, WHBF moved to its present location in the Telco Building on 3rd Avenue. At this time the station became an affiliate of CBS.

The 1920s was also a boom period for athletics. Parks were upgraded and the city built tennis courts, a baseball diamond and two golf courses to cater to the increased interest in these sports. Rock Island was also home to a professional football team, the Independents, and a semi-pro baseball team,



The Rock Island Independents were members of the National Football League. Players such as Jug, Ziggy, Buck, Oke, and Brick are pictured in 1921.

the Islanders. Both teams drew large crowds when they played at Douglas Park on 9th Street. Once artificial lights were installed at the park in 1930, spectators also enjoyed the spectacle of night games.

Two noteworthy events stirred the city's enthusiasm during this time period. Renowned aviator Charles Lindbergh visited the area in 1927. He was the guest of honor at a dinner in Rock Island, but wisely chose to not show favoritism to either side of the river and spent the night on Arsenal Island at Quarters One, the commander's residence. Two years later, a new wave of excitement swept the city. The famous airship, the Graf Zeppelin flew over Rock Island to the cheers of the entire population gathered in the streets below. The Graf was on an around-the-world flight and its commander had agreed to make a detour to accommodate the large German population of nearby Davenport.

THE GREAT DEPRESSION AND WPA PROJECTS

This awe-inspiring occasion of 1929 was followed by the crash of the stock market and the beginning of the Great Depression. Although there were runs on banks and failures of many businesses all over America, Rock Island closed the year on a note of optimism. It had been a good year for both retail and wholesale industries. Fifty-six new businesses had located in the city, and banks recorded a marked increase in deposits over the preceding year. Some 31,400 visitors attended conventions in Rock Island and spent an estimated \$390,000 during their stay in the city. Other welcome news included another cut in long distance telephone calls, the fourth reduction in three years.

It had not been a good year for either the pro football team or the semi-pro baseball team, but pride was restored when the new \$175,000 high school stadium opened and the home team easily defeated their opponents, Grant High School of Cedar Rapids. 1929 also marked the completion of a six year

plan to renovate city parks. Tennis and horse shoes were popular activities and 41 adult baseball teams competed in six recreational leagues.

Economic conditions remained stable for the first five months of 1930 and then the effects of the Depression began to show. The power company reported a steady decline in consumption of gas and electricity as businesses cut hours and shortened the work week. Farmers' losses were compounded



An early automobile sits along brick-paved 12th Street near 4th Avenue.

by a severe drought and prolonged high summer temperatures. The Rock Island Chamber of Commerce adopted the slogan "Buy Now," and urged all residents to support local merchants and not go out of town to purchase goods. The results of this

campaign were encouraging and by the December holiday, trade was deemed satisfactory.

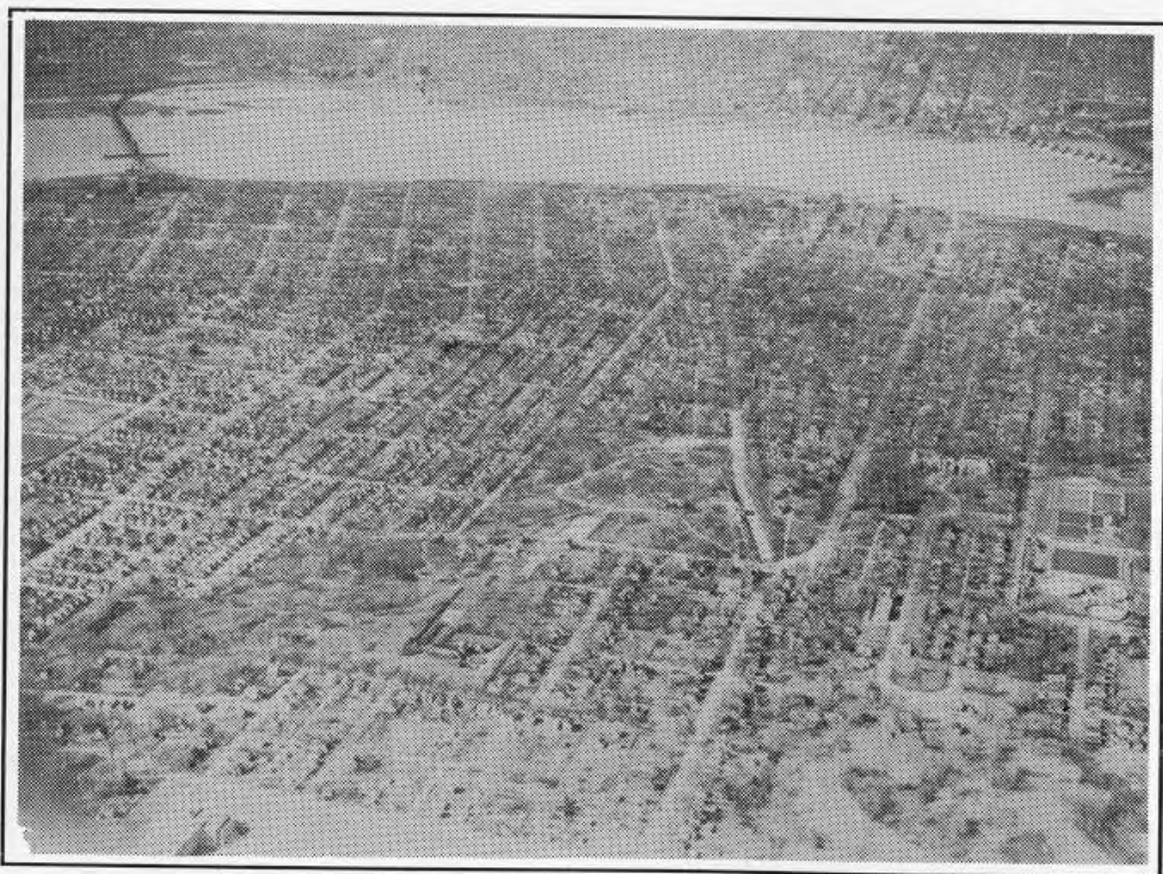
Other figures, however, were not so heartening. The city managed to balance its budget, but reported that the cash flow in the General Fund was dangerously low due to expenditures for relief programs. The Rescue Mission noted that 234 families that had requested assistance in December of 1930 constituted a larger number of needy cases than had occurred in the entire preceding year. Citizens, however, responded generously to charity appeals and the Argus reported with pride that over \$18,500 had been raised in 40 days from "those who had jobs for those who did not."

Despite the cautious optimism of many civic leaders, the slump continued into 1931 and 1932, and the Chamber of Commerce's slogan "Prosperity Always Comes Back" had a hollow ring. Unemployment increased and many employees only worked three days a week. Income from conventions dropped drastically and the post office receipts were down. The City Council faced severe financial problems and threatened deep cuts in services and programs. The Welfare Association aided over 1,450 jobless families and the Rescue Mission provided free lodging to 11,000 needy people. It was estimated that during these years there was a 200% increase in funds collected and dispersed for the poor.

There were some bright spots, however. Several companies, most notably Servus Rubber, set new production records and some employees were working a six day week. A bank crisis was averted when a failed bank merged with two other banks to form the Rock Island Bank and Trust Company. The Arsenal employment level in 1932 was the highest in 10 years and work on the roller dam at Lock and Dam 15 provided up to 1,800 much needed jobs. The Rock Island River Rail Terminal, the first of its kind in Illinois, opened in May of 1931, and handled over 11,000 tons of freight in the initial seven months of its existence.

One result of more leisure time and reduced paychecks was a 25% jump in the use of recreational facilities. The park board responded to this development by enlarging existing programs and offering many new activities for all age groups. Adult baseball was expanded to include a record 143 teams and was so popular a new rule limiting players to membership in only two teams had to be enforced in 1933. It was with great pride that city officials suggested Rock Island had the largest municipal program of adult amateur athletic competition of any city its size in the country.

By the end of 1933, there were signs that the Depression was losing its grip on the community. Some 130 new business concerns had located in Rock Island during the year, including American Container Corporation, which had a workforce of 80 people. In cooperation with the Civil Works Program



An aerial view of Rock Island taken prior to 1939 shows the recently completed Corps of Engineers roller dams and the noticeable absence of Centennial Bridge at 15th Street. Construction of the Reservoir is taking place at 18th Avenue and 22nd Street. (Photo courtesy of City of Rock Island).

(WPA) some 1,200 men were hired to work on street and sewer projects. Continued construction of Lock and Dam 15 and construction of the National Guard Armory also provided jobs for the unemployed. (See Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture). The Civilian Conservation Corps built the lodge at Black Hawk State Historic Site at this time.

Conditions continued to improve. 1935 saw gains in both the retail and wholesale trade and businesses spent over \$385,000 on renovation or enlargement of their premises. International Harvester, which began the manufacture of Farmall tractors in the city in 1926, launched a \$1,000,000 expansion program. The company employed 4,600 workers and claimed the Rock Island plant was now the largest of its kind in the world. A record amount of freight was handled by the River Rail Terminal and the consumption of gas and electricity reached an all-time high.

The Argus noted the city had attracted 93 new businesses in 1935. One of these, Arthur J. Hause and Company, a large department store, announced its opening by having a big parade downtown. Situated at 1721-31 3rd Avenue, the store created jobs for 75 people and attracted many out of town shoppers. Automobile dealers celebrated by holding a large automotive show in the old Illinois Theatre. (One sobering result of increased motor traffic was the number of auto-related deaths on city streets. Thirty-seven people were killed, four times the mortality rate of 1933.)

Year end reports were glowing. The city not only balanced its budget, but showed a reserve of almost \$70,000. WPA projects had helped to dramatically reduce the number of unemployed. Instead of the 4,671 families on relief in April of 1935, November records showed only 400 families needing assistance. In fact, the rise in employment was beginning to create a housing shortage in Rock Island. Small wonder that the Chamber of Commerce adopted as their new slogan the rallying words: "Forward with Rock Island in 1936."

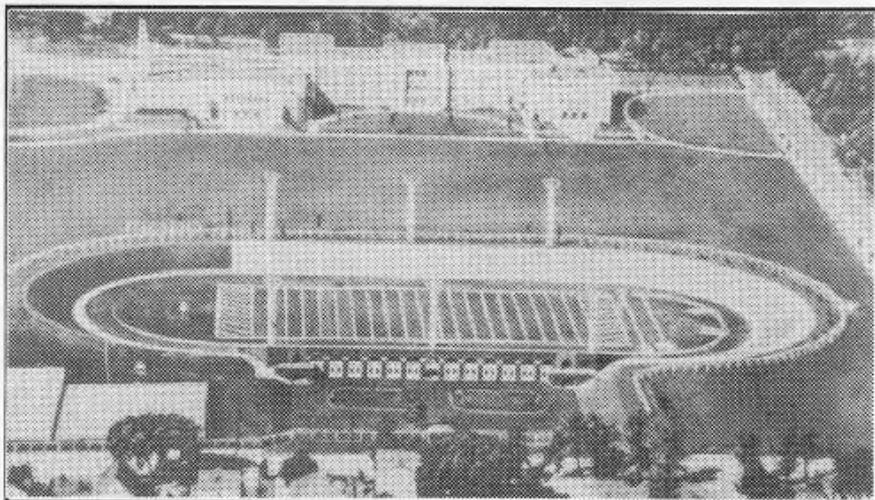
The Chamber's optimism was justified. 1936 was indeed a year of increased prosperity throughout the city. A record number of people had jobs, many of them related to federally funded public building projects. Construction by the private sector also rose. A total of 77 new homes were built, giving Rock Island the distinction of ranking third in the state for residential construction during the summer of 1936. Railroad freight was the heaviest since 1929, and new streamlined trains improved passenger service to and from Rock Island. The city had sufficient funds to improve the road surfaces, buy a street sweeper, add more men to the police force, modernize the pumping station and spend \$35,000 on improvements to the existing parks.

Financial stability helped the city address the need to provide an additional way to cross the Mississippi. The double-decker Arsenal Bridge was often congested, and when the wing span opened for boats passing through Lock and Dam 15, traffic came to a standstill. A bridge commission had studied the problem for several years and by the end of 1936, suggested the con-

struction of a tunnel underneath the river to link Rock Island and Davenport. Studies indicated a tunnel would be most cost effective because a bridge would require high expenditures for land acquisition in both cities to accommodate the bridge spans and ramps.

The plan was rejected in 1937 on the grounds that although it might cost less to build a tunnel initially, the upkeep of the tunnel would be more costly than the maintenance of a bridge in future years. Also, Davenport officials decided not to share in the cost of the tunnel because their appeal for funds from the State of Iowa had been refused. Rock Island then approved plans for a bridge and agreed to pay for its construction. Three years later, Mayor Galbraith was joined by Dwight H. Green, Governor of Illinois, and other dignitaries at ribbon-cutting ceremonies that signaled the opening of the long awaited bridge. Originally, the city had decided to name the bridge for Mayor Galbraith, but the mayor changed its name to the Centennial Bridge during dedication ceremonies. (See [Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture](#).)

Centennial Bridge was not the only new structure to be opened in 1939. Rock Islanders celebrated the dedication of the \$400,000 Rock Island Armory, the first building in Illinois to house units



The newly completed Rock Island High School and Stadium. (Circa 1939).

of both the National and Naval Reserves. Over 3,000 people joined newly elected Illinois Governor Horner for ceremonies on the riverfront on Armistice Day. Rock Island's high school, located beyond the bluffs at 1400 25th Avenue was also finally finished. (See [Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture](#)).

Other evidence of the building boom included expansion of International Harvester, work on the R.O. Sala Apartments at 19th Street and 5th Avenue (the owner, Dr. R.O. Sala, was the son-in-law of Dr. Elmo M. Sala, who had built the first downtown apartments some 34 years earlier), and the 118 permits issued by the city during 1937 for new homes. (See [Rock Island's Modernistic Architecture](#) and [Downtown Walking Tour](#).) The park board approved the construction of two new playgrounds and the addition of a greenhouse and conservatory to Longview Park, and again reported an increase in the usage of park facilities.

On the retail front, sales equaled those of pre-depression days, due in part to the decision of Montgomery Ward and Sears & Roebuck to open branches

On the retail front, sales equaled those of pre-depression days, due in part to the decision of Montgomery Ward and Sears & Roebuck to open branches in downtown Rock Island. This meant the city had the advantage of four large department stores, which competed with each other to provide a great variety of goods at the lowest prices possible. In fact, nine special sales were held in 1936 and attracted customers from many other communities. Men's campus coats sold for \$6.45, work pants cost 98 cents, and ladies shoes ranged in price from \$2.49 - \$8.00.

LOOKING TO A GOLDEN FUTURE

1937 was also the 100th anniversary of the incorporation of the City of Stephenson, later to be re-named Rock Island. Residents could look back with pride on the accomplishments of their city. From a small settlement on the banks of the Mississippi, where once the Sauk and Mesquakie had hunted game, Rock Island had developed into a thriving community of over 41,000 inhabitants.

What factors were responsible for success? Certainly, the city's natural resources and location on the Mississippi had given the community early trading advantages, but it was due to the determined efforts of Rock Island's civic leaders who actively promoted these advantages, that the city developed into a major distribution center. Once the railroads reached the area, Rock Island was in the enviable position of being able to offer river-rail facilities at a time when the nation was engrossed with westward expansion. The boom that followed, coupled with the rapid growth of the lumber industry, gave Rock Island not only financial stability, but also the luxury of additional funds to improve the physical appearance of the community and the lives of its citizens. Economic security also helped to insure the ability of the city to recover from the times of instability and economic slump that inevitably had followed each period of growth.

Rock Islanders had only to remember the bleak years of the Great Depression to realize how important strong leadership and community cooperation had been to their survival and present affluence. They could and did feel proud and optimistic as the year drew to its close. Prosperity was in evidence everywhere. Small wonder citizens flocked to New Year's Eve parties, and the Fort Armstrong Hotel reported a sellout for its evening of festivities. The Depression seemed a thing of the past, and Rock Island looked forward with confidence and anticipation to a golden future.

For more information about Rock Island's 20th century residential neighborhoods, with special information about the World War I, World War II and post-war developments, please see the 1999 publication sponsored by the Rock Island Preservation Commission, entitled Rock Island's Historic Residential Neighborhoods, 1835-1955: A Summary Report by James E. Jacobsen.

Rock Island Timeline

1760: Saukenuk founded at mouth of Rock River.	
1805: Lt. Zebulon Pike arrives at Saukenuk.	April 30, 1803: Louisiana Purchase
July 21, 1814: Black Hawk attacks American troops.	1812: Black Hawk allies with British.
1818: Illinois becomes a state.	May 10, 1816: Fort Armstrong constructed on Rock Island.
1833: George Davenport builds Greek Revival home on Rock Island.	June 30, 1831: Black Hawk surrenders.
March, 1841: City of Rock Island incorporated.	October 1, 1837: Village of Stephenson is incorporated.
1851: Father Alleman starts St. James Catholic Church (now St. Mary's).	July 4, 1845: Colonel George Davenport murdered in his home by robbers.
1855: Chippiannock Cemetery established.	June 5, 1854: First train to Mississippi River arrives in Rock Island.
1856: First train bridge spans Mississippi River at Rock Island.	1856: Philander Cable and Philemon Mitchell arrive in Rock Island.
1861: Mitchell and Lynde start First National Bank.	1856: The steamer Effie Afton strikes new bridge.
August 20, 1866: Chicago, Rock Island and Pacific Railroad incorporated.	December 4, 1863: First Confederate prisoners arrive at Rock Island prison camp.
1870: McCabe's Department store opens.	1869: Volunteer firefighters get steam engine.
1872: Rock Island Public Library created.	1871: Harper's Hotel takes first lodgers.
1876: Streets and avenues renamed with numbers.	1875: Augustana College moves to Rock Island.
	1884: Toboggan slide constructed at Watchtower Amusement Park.

Rock Island Timeline Continued

<p>1888: Citizens Improvement Association paves Second Avenue with bricks.</p>		
<p>1892: Rock Island Brewing Company created by merger of Atlantic and Huber.</p>		<p>January 9, 1890: Bailey Davenport dies.</p>
<p>October 1, 1895: Edward Sweeney gives oration at Courthouse dedication.</p>		<p>March 28, 1893: St. Anthony's Hospital takes first patients.</p>
<p>1898: William Jennings Bryan speaks at dedication for MWA Building.</p>		<p>1897: Bailey Davenport's pasture is sold for civic purposes.</p>
<p>March 2, 1901: Villa de Chantal opened by Sisters of the Visitation.</p>		<p>1899: A.D. Huesing Bottling Works opens.</p>
<p>July 10, 1908: Ceremonies held for opening of Longview Park.</p>		<p>1907: Hennepin Canal completed.</p>
<p>March 27, 1912: Market Square riot spurred by John Looney.</p>		<p>1909: Lincoln Park dedicated on eastern bluff top.</p>
<p>October 5, 1918: Excavation starts on 217 U.S. Housing Corporation houses.</p>		<p>April 23, 1915: Searstown annexed to Rock Island.</p>
<p>October 6, 1922: Connor Looney killed in gun battle.</p>		<p>1919: Billy Sunday sponsors seven weeks of revival meetings.</p>
<p>1923: Jim Thorpe joins Independents, who beat Chicago Bears.</p>		<p>1923: Servus Rubber opens.</p>
<p>1927: International Harvester opens Rock Island plant.</p>		<p>1925: John Looney sentenced to 14 years at Joliet.</p>
<p>October 5, 1929: Rocky Stadium completed.</p>		<p>1928: Royal Neighbors of America builds Supreme Office Building.</p>
<p>February 16, 1936: Streetcar lines change over to buses.</p>		<p>1932: Lock and Dam 15 constructed by Army Corps</p>
<p>October 25, 1937: Rock Island High School dedicated.</p>		<p>November 11, 1937: National Guard Armory dedicated.</p>
		<p>1938: Work begins on Rock Island-Davenport bridge.</p>

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Background: G.A.R. Encampment in 1902
on Second Avenue, from *Picturesque Tri Cities*

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