

George Rockenbach Dies

First Vote for Abraham Lincoln, [1936]

George Rockenbach, the "grand old man of Deerfield," who was an actual witness during the years of Chicago's Century of Progress, died on May 16 at his home, 550 Elm street, Deerfield after a short illness. He was 95 years old.

White bearded, jaunty, erect of carriage, and still able to drive his own automobile until a few days before his death, Rockenbach maintained a close interest in all contemporary affairs. On the occasion of his 95th birthday last Feb. 1 [2], he commented on the political situation.

"My parents brought me here at the age of 2 months from Alsace Lorraine," he said, "to escape European dictators and enjoy democracy. But it seems to me that if this so-called New Deal continues we will have a dictator here. I cast my first vote for Abe Lincoln, and I think the only hope for the country is to restore a Republican administration."

Rockenbach was a baby in his mother's arms when his parents and four other families from the old country journeyed northwest from Chicago in search of farm lands. The wooded valley of the Des Plaines River in the Deerfield district attracted them and they settled there.

"My earliest recollections were of Indians and log cabins," said the pioneer. "There is an old oak tree in Deerfield that means more to me than to most folks, As a boy I stood under it while an Indian brave asked me to watch him shoot a bird in the tree. He missed.

"Chicago streets were nothing but mudholes then. Our farm wagons were always getting stuck, which meant a lot of tiring labor, particularly after the six hour drive to town."

How different would his life have been had he remained in Chicago, Rockenbach reflected. But he remained in Deerfield and found life pleasant. He knew every one and every one knew him.

For seventeen years he was highway commissioner of Deerfield township. He was a member of the first board of trustees of the Deerfield-Shields high school and a director of the Deerfield State Bank until last year*

When A Century of Progress opened in 1933, Rockenbach was one of the first visitors. He drove into Chicago, looked around the town, and paused to make a few reflections.

"A ride on Milwaukee avenue was certainly a revelation," he said. "It was out the old Milwaukee avenue trail that my parents moved in their search for farm land."

"Newcomers will be able to sense what A Century of Progress means - the changes that have taken place since the days of the Indians, and the mudhole on the lake front and the log cabins and the stage coaches. I've seen most of those changes as they unfolded."

Rockenbach was unable to join the union army in the civil war because of family responsibilities. But one of his closest friends was Valentine Hess, the last veteran in the neighborhood, who died in 1934 at the age of 93•

Mr. Rockenbach's wife died 38 years ago. He is survived by seven children, twenty-six grandchildren, and twenty-four great grandchildren.

The children are Mrs. Ella Plagge, Viola, Irene, Orman, Almon of Crystal Lake, Samuel and Preston.