

THE ROCKENBACH FAMILY [1927]

To few men is given the privilege of long outliving the "biblical span of life of "three score years and ten," to be able at the age of 87 to have possession of all of his faculties, lead an active civic life, and have a memory so keen as to be historical.

Such a man is our Mr. George Rockenbach, third of the family to bear the name, the oldest man in the vicinity, and who has lived in this locality since four months of age.

In April, 1841, at the age of two months, with his brother Philip, his father George Rockenbach, Jr., and his mother who was Salome Reidlinger, his grandfather Philip Reidlinger, and an uncle Christian Reidlinger, and other families, those of Philip Wolf, George Iehl, Philip Gutzler and George Lehman. They left Gerstheim, near Strassburg in Alsace, to escape the crowded condition of their village, and to avoid military service in Germany. Their sailing vessel, the Deutschland, took thirty-five days in crossing. Their journey from New York was by canal to Buffalo, then by ox teams to Chicago. After arriving in Chicago they remained for a week to rest at the home of Jacob Rehm, who lived near the waterworks and who had come to America with Andrew Meyer, who settled on section 31 in Deerfield township on government land in 1839. Jacob Rehm's wagon carried the women and children of the Rockenbach pioneer party from Chicago to Lake County. The men walked all of the way. The western and southern boundaries of Deerfield township were selected as farms.

From Judge Bradley, George Rockenbach, the father, bought a farm on Milwaukee Avenue, near Wheeling, for which Bradley paid the government \$1.25 per acre, and sold for \$4.00 per acre. A crude log house on the farm housed part of the pioneers, and another on the Job W. Tripp farm held the young Rockenbach family. The children attended the Tripp school. Jacob Ott and his five sons, Jacob Jr., Lawrence, Casper, John and Philip, and his two daughters, Salome, who became Mrs. Philip Brand, and Magdalena, who married George Escher, married and lived within a short distance of each other. The Casper Ott farm now belongs to Frank Siljestrom.

On September 3, 1864, George Rockenbach, the third, married Sarah Ott, daughter of Lorenz and Ursula Rieg Ott. The George Rockenbachs had eight children, all but one of whom are living [1927], Ella, Adelaide, Orman, Almon, Samuel, Viola, Preston and Irene Rockenbach.

Ella married William F. Plagge and had six children: Irwin, Margareth, Auston, Harold, Vera and Vida (twins). Orman married Mary Whitney and had six children: Almira, Whitney, Lillian, Alice, Helen and Lydia. Almon married Elizabeth Catlow and had fourteen children: Esther, Robert, Ruth, Elizabeth, George, Joseph, Shirley, Raymond, Lyle, Mary, Rodney, Sarah, Dorothy and Philip. Samuel married Emma Rosenow. Preston married Lida Landau and has one child, Vernon. Misses Viola and Irene Rockenbach did not marry.

George Rockenbach has twenty-seven grandchildren and thirteen great-grandchildren. In the last group are Frank Heybeck, son of Almira Rockenbach Heybeck, Marolyn and Jack Gagne, children of Vera Plagge Gagne; Dorothy Jacobson, daughter of Vida Plagge Jacobson; Shirley, Charles and Nancy Mills, children of Esther Rockenbach Mills; Lorraine Plagge, daughter of Auston Plagge; Elaine, Leland and Betty June and Raymond Plagge, children of Harold Plagge; and Marie Rockenbach, daughter of Whitney Rockenbach.

To walk from the Des Plaines river to Highland Park to pick berries, and to see "Indian Clark," the John K. Clark in our Deerfield cemetery, carry a deer, are remembrances of George Rockenbach's youth.

A red letter day in his life was Monday, October 10, 1871, when he started toward Chicago, with a wagon full of oats, potatoes, butter and eggs. When he reached Niles he began to meet excited people driving away from the city who called out, "Farmer go back. You cannot sell anything in Chicago, the whole town is burning." Mr. Rockenbach decided to proceed, for he figured that food was necessary when stores were burned. At Holstein, then the name of the North Avenue district, he found the street blockaded, so he went west to Erie street to a tavern, conducted by Martin Stanger, of Wheeling, where George's brother, Fred Rockenbach, was employed. Both men were absent fighting the fire. The Chicago Avenue bridge then started to burn, so George unloaded his produce and put it in a butcher shop, and with the help of Mrs. Stanger loaded all of her furniture into the wagon. In the evening Fred and George Rockenbach began the journey to the home of Daniel Stanger in Wheeling, with Mrs. Martin Stanger.

Most of the trip was on the railroad tracks, and so brilliant was the illumination from the doomed city, that a newspaper could be read in Wheeling and Deerfield at midnight by members of the families who were eagerly awaiting the return of their relatives.

In the George Rockenbach home are many mementoes of past generations. Arrowheads used by the Indians, an ox shoe, a large mahogany Waterbury clock 90 years old, and Sander's Fourth Readers used 80 years ago [1847]. These books contain such stories and poems as "Sorrow for the Dead," "How Dreadful Is This Place For God Is Here," "Reflections on Early Death," etc.

The Vernon Ridge Golf Club is now [on] the Ott and Rockenbach farms. The barn has been rebuilt as a charming home, and what was once a cowstable is now a beautiful sun parlor.

George Rockenbach assisted in building the now vacant Northfield Evangelical Church at the southwest corner of the Northfield corners. He was a director in the Wilmot School for fifteen years, and was a member from Deerfield of the first board of education of the Deerfield Township High School. He helped finance the Evangelical Association Church which met at the home of Charles G. Muhlke, now Briergate Golf Club. He has been a member of the Northfield Township Farmers Mutual Fire and Lightning Insurance Company for 63 years, a director for 26 years, and president for 8 years.

He was appointed by Governors Altgeld and Deneen, as delegate from Illinois to the Farmer's National Congress in Oklahoma City in 1907; in Madison, Wis., in 1908; in Lincoln, Neb., in 1910 and in Plano, Ill., in 1913. He was supervisor for Deerfield Township from 1913 to 1917, and for seventeen years was highway commissioner. He is a director in the Deerfield State Bank, and president of the North Northfield Cemetery Association.

When 24 years of age Mr. Rockenbach moved to the Lawrence Ott farm in Deerfield Township. He cast his first presidential vote for Abraham Lincoln, in the old Carolan School, which was the polling place for entire Deerfield Township. With the exception of the spring of 1925 when he was in California with his son Preston, he has never missed voting at any election in Deerfield Township, and at one time the polling place was in Highland Park, and later at Blodgett.

In 1897 the George Rockenbach family bought a small farm of the Hall family, and lived in the house until a new one was built in 1907.

Mrs. Rockenbach died in 1899. Miss Viola Rockenbach has kept house for her father

ever since.

Miss Irene Rockenbach has been superintendent of the Children's Division of the Michigan Council of Religious education for five years. She resigned in June [1927] because of illness, and is spending the summer at her cottage at Turk Lake, where her father and sister visited her.

Orman Rockenbach lived on the farm that had been in the possession of members of the Ott family since 1836, until he moved to Lake Zurich.

George Rockenbach, at 87 years of age, drives his own automobile.

Philip Rockenbach was the son of George and Ursula Rieg, Riek, Eckerch or Ekerick as the name has been variously spelled. The address of a relative, Peter Urban a' Ekerick, was written also Eckerch. Peter lived in Canton St. Marie aux Mines Department du Hout Rhein a' France.

Philip Rockenbach was born March 9, 1834 in Gerstheim, Alsace, and came to Lake County when he was seven years of age. In Northfield he married Mary Schmidt, daughter of Johannes Schmidt, born May 12, 1812, and died September 10, 1895, and his wife, Katarena, who was born June 5, 1813, and died July 10, 1898.

The Schmidt lot is in the Northfield Cemetery. Mr. and Mrs. Philip Rockenbach had five children who attended the Tripp School that was built in 1840 and named for Job Tripp, who gave the land. The Rockenbach children were Julia, Ida, Albert and William (twins) and Laura. William died at five years of age.

Ida Rockenbach married George Stanger, son of Daniel and Mary Escher Stanger, and had three children, Floyd, Edna and Lester. Floyd Stanger married Una Plagge, daughter of Henry and Sarah Fritsch Plagge, and has two sons, Clifford and George the second. Edna Stanger married Rev. Charles K. Orsborn, son of Rev. Albert and Jean Orsbom of Toronto, Canada. Lester Stanger married Ethel McBride, daughter of Thomas and Phidelia McBride of Area, and has one daughter, Bonita Besse Stanger.

Julia Rockenbach married Daniel Wessling, son of Henry and Elseben Plagge Wessling, and had six children, Clarence, Della, Mayme, Raymond, Gladys and Homer Wessling. Clarence Wessling married Sadie ----- and had two children. Della Wessling married Allen Hilman, and has five children. Mayme Wessling married Dr. George Kester, and has two children. Gladys Wessling married Glen Stewart and has three children (including twins).

Raymond Wessling married Cora Thompson and has two children. Albert Rockenbach married Joanna Stryker, daughter of George and Salome Arnold Stryker and had five children, Belle, Ora, Roger, May and Melvina Rockenbach. Laura Rockenbach married Edwin Plagge and has one child, Grace Plagge, who married Vinton Thompson and has two children, Betty Jane and Vinton Thompson, Jr.