

# POWER HOUSE POST

ELECTRIFYING NEWS FROM THE ROCKFORD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY

2020 Volume 3 July



## Scarecrows, Pumpkins, and Grandma's Attic FACE CANCELLATION

For the first time in 23 years, Denise Bradley, the founder and driving force behind Make It "N" Take It Scarecrows from the very beginning, won't be seen next to the dam this fall with a big smile on her face and making even bigger smiles on the faces of thousands of visitors who now come to make this event the **LARGEST SCARECROW BUILDING EVENT IN THE USA**

Based on 2019, this cancellation along with that of our two year old **pumpkin sale** and our **Grandma's Attic Sale**, would eliminate our biggest fundraising efforts of the year, creating a shortfall of almost **\$9,000.00** (OVER 25% of our budget.)

The RAHS Board has pledged to make whatever difficult decisions are needed to address this issue but some expenses including utilities, insurance, and supplies needed for the work that is ongoing will continue regardless of our income even while the RAM remains closed.

Donations of any amount to help offset this unexpected shortfall will be appreciated but regardless, we will continue to do what we can to serve the community.

With all that we have had to deal with recently, we decided to include the newsletter basics plus some informative and interesting content in this newsletter. We can all use a short break from the news these days. We hope you enjoy the fun facts and interesting articles inside.



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## Do You Know The REAL John Sjogren Story? See it here...in his own words.

Please note that some of what is included here, notably the use of the term "Jap" and "Nip" to describe the enemy soldiers is understandably considered politically incorrect today. No disrespect is intended by sharing this story just as it was originally described. I think we have to remember that those were times when thinking and actions were the result of experiencing the tragedy of war.

The RAM has, in its archives, an interview with John Sjogren that was conducted by Lieut. George Larson, Public Relations Office, 40th Infantry Division. This interview took place in August 1945 on Panay Island in the Philippines. **The following is a brief synopsis of that 14 page interview that was verified by John Sjogren on Aug. 26, 1945**

Many of us know that John Sjogren was a local WWII hero and that his statue stands in front of the RAM, but many haven't seen the details of how Sjogren earned the Congressional Medal of Honor...in his own words.

This story includes commentary from Lieut. Larson and Sjogren's own description of some of the events that led to his receiving the Medal of Honor. It is an amazing story.

**NOTE: The award is officially called The Medal of Honor. It is often called the "Congressional" medal because Congress issues it.**

Lt. Sjogren was in church on Panay Island on August 19th, his twenty ninth birthday, when word that he was being awarded the Medal of Honor reached his company. They told him when he returned from church. He commented "It sure is a wonderful birthday present" and "Probably the only thing that saved me was prayer. I didn't ask God to save me. I only said that what was His will was alright with me."

Larsen points out that Sjogren was initially classified 4F, by a doctor who said "You'll never get in the Army, son" because of two deformed vertebrae in his back

He was called up for limited service in December of 1942, He asked for 1A status and Infantry duty. Both requests were granted.

That started the remarkable story of Sjogren's WWII exploits that led to him becoming the first soldier in the 40th Infantry to receive the Medal of Honor, and Rockford's true national hero.

On May 23, 1945, Hill 3155 near San Jose Hacienda was the final objective of the 40th Infantry Division. The hill was open terrain with scattered underbrush and shattered trees. A reinforced company of Japs occupied the strongly fortified position. Given the mission to flank the hill, Sgt. Sjogren's Company came up behind the Japs.

To Sjogren and his mates it looked like a suicide assignment but they worked their way to the crest. The Japs were in the middle of the ridge now, with our troops coming up on both sides. The ridge was 300 yards long and only about 15 feet wide with a 200 foot drop off on both sides. Someone would have to die.

Sjogren said " My squad was on the right. Sgt. Ware of Pinson, Alabama had a squad on the left. His squad was fired on and was told to hold up a bit. I knew the lay of the land because I had scouted it that morning. We worked ahead while the Japs lobbed grenades and anti-personnel bombs."

"Then my second in command was killed. It made me sick and mad. By that time I had only 4 men left. Grenades had wounded some. I sized up the situation"

"We were pinned down by Nip machine gun fire. I told the rest of my squad to start passing up hand grenades. They thought I was foolish and would give away our positions, but I started heaving them wherever I figured the Japs were. I could hear them holler. Bullets were flying all around us. Sometimes I threw them from my knees and other times on my belly. Some were phosphorus but most were fragmentation grenades."

"I could see some of the Japs starting to take off. I shouted "Let's go" and we started forward. In the first position ahead, I saw a Jap with his lower jaw shot off. He had an M-1 but was playing dead. I was watching another pillbox when this Jap fired 3 shots at me. They went right past my ear. I don't see how he missed me."

"PFC Frank McClovic from Flushing, Ohio, my 2nd scout, knocked him down with a rifle. I squirmed up and threw a grenade into the hole. Then we moved up and blasted a machine gun position. I squirmed up close enough to toss a grenade through a hole in the top of the pillbox"

See Sjogren on Pg. 2

### Sjogren (Cont.)

"The Japs had a complicated network of pill-boxes, trenches, and spider holes. My squad kept picking them off as they ran from their holes. They also kept me covered as I crept up close to one pillbox after another. Each has a slit about a foot high and 2 feet long. Sometimes I threw a grenade from about 20 yards and sometimes I got within a yard and pushed the grenade in. The rest of our platoon came up from behind and another company rushed them from the other end. It was soon over."

When the Third Battalion S-2 counted the dead Japs, they found a lot more than 43 but they agreed that Sgt. Sjogren had accounted for at least that number. That battle just about ended the fighting for the 160th Infantry. They ordered Sgt. Sjogren and his skeleton squad back to the battalion command post for a rest. On July 5, the battalion S-1 (personnel officer), Captain Tom Lawson of Santa Monica, California, called Sgt. Sjogren into his office and asked if he wanted a commission.

"That was the biggest surprise of my life" says Lt. Sjogren. He had never even thought of being an officer, but now he accepted the field commission. Lieutenant Colonel James Marr had already recommended him for the Medal of Honor, and waited, confident that it would be approved.

The recommendation added some things that Sjogren didn't mention. One of the grenades which the enemy threw out of a pillbox resulted in his being wounded, but despite his painful injuries, he continued on his way....and in one instance he grabbed the barrel of an enemy machine gun and pulled it out of the pillbox. He also killed one Japanese in hand to hand combat.

Back in Rockford, Michigan, (population under 2,000), no one had dreamed that John Sjogren would ever take to fighting Japs so naturally, much less become a national hero at it. His parents, Mr. and Mrs. Carl E. Sjogren of Swedish descent had taught him early to pray and go to church. He led a clean life, didn't smoke or drink.

No wonder it was difficult, and perhaps still is, for some to reconcile this background with the ugly task of killing Japs, living among the dead and dying, risking his life daily in jungle warfare.

"Killing Japs was like shooting rabbits" he explained. "But now it's different. I don't want to talk about killing anyone. God made us all and I don't feel mad at the Japs now. We were in the war and we believed the world would be better off if we won."

His experiences haven't changed him. He still doesn't smoke or drink. He is a little worried about some minor cuss words he has picked up and intends to forget them before he goes home. He is thinking about his Sunday School class and is anxious to meet with

the Young People's Society at his church again. John's life revolved around the Algoma Baptist Church which he joined at age 12.

When he gets home he has a couple of people he wants to see besides his parents, brothers, and a sister. First there's an uncle, Edward Erickson of Rockford. Mr. Erickson, who was in WW1, told John to "stay out of the infantry." John will tell him that the infantry is the best branch the Army and that he is proud of it.

Then he will look up the Grand Rapids doctor who told him that he would "never get into the Army." Maybe that five feet, ten inch frame and 185 pounds will look pretty fit now.

But the date Lieutenant Sjogren says he is going to keep is right at his mother's table. "Nobody cooks like Mom does" he beams. "The meal I dream about is stuffed pork chops—that's my dish—with fresh fried potatoes. And I want to eat some more of that delicious apple pie with plenty of milk to drink"

Sjogren returned to his dreams in the Rockford area where he received a hero's welcome with a parade down Main Street on Sept. 14, 1945, and a brand new car. He died from cancer on August 30, 1987 at the age of 71.

### Safe Outdoor Viewing of RAM Exhibit

During these difficult times, a lot of things have come to a halt including the operation of the Rockford Area Museum (RAM). A new revolving exhibit of "The Rockford Story Through Postcards" had recently been set up in March when the museum was forced to close. We were hoping that this would be a very temporary situation, but clearly that has not been the case.

It was unfortunate that guests have not been able to view the great collection of hundreds of cards from the RAM archives and the private collection of Terry Konkle, Historical Society President, so the RAM staff decided to do something about that.

Ian McCormick, one of the RAM's most dedicated volunteers has started to make enlarged copies of the cards to post in the RAM window and door panels. Almost 70 cards were posted on the door panels on Sunday, July 19. They can be easily viewed from the outside. We expect that approximately 140 more will be put up by early August.

Take a peek at Rockford's history through postcards from the comfort and safety of the outdoors. This is a great opportunity to enjoy the area's history or to share it with your family. The RAM is located at Pearl Street and Monroe, right across the parking lot from City Hall.

Information and more historic Rockford and WWW photos can be found on our website at [rockfordmuseum.org](http://rockfordmuseum.org). You can also call Al Pratt, RAM Director, at 616 485-4144

For now, the Rockford Area Historical Society and museum staff urges you to be safe and healthy until we can see you at the RAM (or at least see you looking at our windows).

### SOME MICHIGAN FACTS YOU MAY FIND INTERESTING

The Detroit Zoo was the 1st zoo in America to have cageless exhibits that allowed animals more freedom to roam

In 1862, James Verner, a pharmacist who was trying to create a new beverage, was called away to serve in the Civil War. When he returned 4 years later, the drink he had stored in an oak case had acquired a delicious gingery flavor. Verner's Ginger Ale was born and became the country's first soda pop.

The Packard Motor Car Company in Detroit manufactured the first car with air conditioning in 1939.

The nation's 1st regularly scheduled air passage service started between Detroit and Grand Rapids in 1926.

Colon, Michigan is home to Abbott Magic, the world's largest manufacturer of magic supplies. Their 50,000 sq. ft. of factory buildings are the only buildings in the world designed for the sole purpose of manufacturing magic. Abbott makes everything from kids magic sets to innovative large stage illusions.

Michigan's state reptile is the painted turtle.

40 of the state's 83 counties adjoin at least one Great Lake.

In 1817, the University of Michigan was the first university established by any of the states. Founded by priests and located in Detroit, it was originally called Cathelepiemian. The name was changed in 1821. The University of Michigan moved to Ann Arbor in 1841.

Standing anywhere in the state, a person is never more than 85 miles from one of the Great Lakes.

Michigan ranks first in the USA for boat registrations.

Michigan is the only place in the world with a floating Post Office. Boats owned by the The J.W. Wescott Company have been delivering mail to ships in the Detroit River since 1895. On October 23, 2001, the *J. W. Westcott II* sank in the deep water under the Ambassador Bridge while caught in the wake of Norwegian oil tanker *MT Sidsel Knutsen*. The captain and one other crew member were killed. It was salvaged, refurbished and returned to service

In 1879, Detroit telephone customers were the first in the nation to be assigned phone numbers to facilitate handling calls.

The 24 foot Leonardo DaVinci Horse at Fred Meijer Gardens is the largest equestrian bronze sculpture in the Western Hemisphere.

In 1829, the Michigan State Police had the world's 1st police radio system.

Michigan State University was founded in 1855 as the nation's first land grant university and served as the prototype for 69 others established under the Morrill Act of 1862. It was the first institution of higher learning in the nation to teach scientific agriculture.

## A WORD FROM THE BOARD by Terry Konkle - President, Rockford Area Historical Society

Because of the Coronavirus situation the Rockford Area Historical Society (RAHS) has cancelled its meetings and other activities. The city of Rockford has closed the Community Cabin for use by organizations and the public until further notice. The only exception the city has made is to allow blood drives to use the building. The Cabin is our meeting place.

Regular meetings were called off beginning in April and no programs or meeting dates have been scheduled for September and beyond. With no meeting in June, which is when our annual election of officers takes place, the board was polled and all officers agreed to continue until we can hold a new election. The Rockford Area Museum (RAM) has also been closed since March and will remain closed until the safety of workers and visitors can be assured as far as the Pandemic is concerned.

The RAHS is working with the city of Rockford to determine future actions concerning the Cabin and the museum. To use either building will require compliance with city and state regulations. We must also be educated on liability in using either location.

The RAHS budget will have to be looked at because some numbers will be changed. The scarecrow fundraiser will not be held this fall and probably the Grandma's Attic will not happen. Our income will not stop because donations, memorial money and dues will continue. The RAHS board will look at the situation, and with the help of our dedicated members and the city, we will make things work. Members are encouraged to contact me ([tnjkonkle@hotmail.com](mailto:tnjkonkle@hotmail.com)) or 616-866-0530 with their thoughts and suggestions.

### NOTICE:

**At this time, the RAM remains CLOSED until FURTHER NOTICE**  
Unfortunately donations of artifacts will not be accepted until some time after the RAM reopens. We hope to be able to accept your items then.

All Historical Society events including Board Meetings and monthly Thursday evening meetings are also CANCELED through August 31, 2020.

For updates, watch our website at [www.rockfordmuseum.org](http://www.rockfordmuseum.org). where you may also use the contact page to reach us. You can also contact Terry Konkle by email at [tnjkonkle@hotmail.com](mailto:tnjkonkle@hotmail.com) or by phone at 616 866-0530 or contact Al Pratt by email at [Rockfordahs@yahoo.com](mailto:Rockfordahs@yahoo.com) or by phone at 616 485-4144.

**We will welcome your comments, questions, and suggestions.**

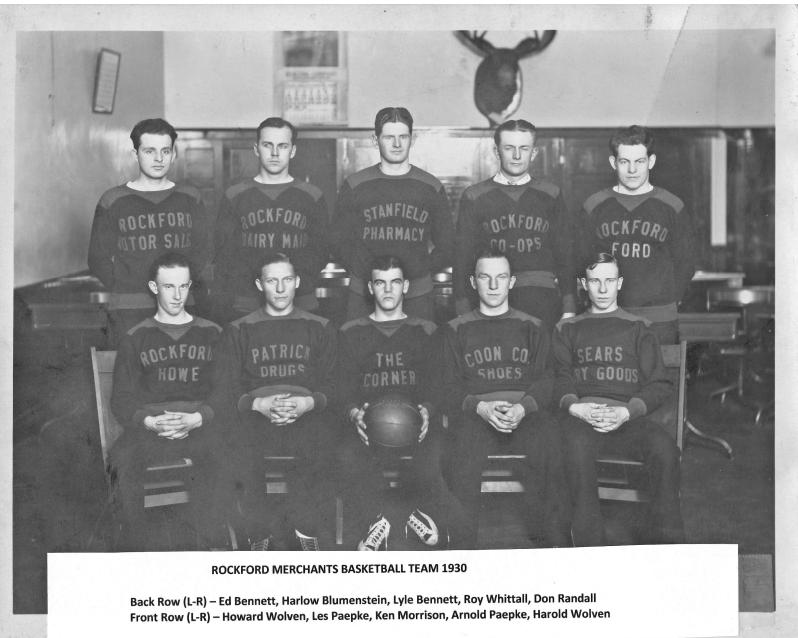
## The Rockford Merchants Basketball Team by Terry Konkle

In the RAM there is a picture of the Rockford Merchants basketball team. There is also a basketball scorebook with many of their games recorded in it. The photo is of the 1930 squad, but the team existed for several years. The 1930 group was a member of the North Division of the Y.M.C.A. league, but they also participated in and won many tournaments on the west side of Michigan. Home games were played in the high school gymnasium on North Main Street. All of the players were Rockford High School graduates and were on the school team during their school years. The Wolven brothers, the Paepke brothers and Blumenstein were 1929 graduates, Randall and Morrison were from the class of 1928, Whittall from 1927, Ed Bennett from 1924 and Lyle Bennett from 1923.

Lyle Bennett was the Rockford football, basketball, track and baseball coach at the high school in 1930 and had been an outstanding athlete during his high school years. Howard and Harold Wolven were attending Davenport College in 1930 where they played for three years. Harold wrote on the back of a team picture that he and his brother played as many as five games a week, three for Rockford and two for Davenport. Roy Whittall was often the leading scorer for the Merchants with most games being low scoring affairs. Harold Wolven commented "we won 25 out of 29 games one season." He did not state the year, but it was probably 1930.

Large crowds attended Rockford's home games and all proceeds from the contests were given to the Rockford school athletic program. The team photo was taken in a classroom of the high school with all of the players identified. Each team member was sponsored by a merchant with the business name on the front of a shirt. The following merchants took part: Rockford Motor Sales, Rockford Dairy Maid, Stanfield Pharmacy, Rockford Co-ops, Rockford Ford, Rockford Hardware, Patrick Drugs, The Corner, Coon Co. Shoes and Sears Dry Goods.

It was very common in history for towns to have teams in the sports of basketball and baseball and competition would be very serious. Rockford inhabitants followed and supported their teams for years, and the Rockford Merchants were an outstanding example of one of those teams!



ROCKFORD MERCHANTS BASKETBALL TEAM 1930

Back Row (L-R) – Ed Bennett, Harlow Blumenstein, Lyle Bennett, Roy Whittall, Don Randall  
Front Row (L-R) – Howard Wolven, Les Paepke, Ken Morrison, Arnold Paepke, Harold Wolven



ROCKFORD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY  
PO BOX 781  
ROCKFORD, MI 49341

## ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED



### WE COULD USE SOME HELP WITH AN OUTDOOR PROJECT - SJOGREN STATUE

The Sjogren statue in front of the RAM is starting to accumulate some white residue deposits in areas. I contacted Ruth Gee, the sculptor who created the statue to ask how that residue could be cleaned off of the statue. She replied with the instructions shown below.

I would start with stainless steel cleaner that is used for kitchen appliances. It gets rid of green and white surface crud. Clean only the areas that need cleaning. I use a kitchen sponge with the green rough surface on one side of the sponge or a stiff nylon brush.

Once cleaned, seal with a paste wax. This works much better on a hot day so the pores of the bronze are open to receive the wax. It will be very hard to do much if under 75 degrees. 80 degrees is ideal. The hotter the better. If bronze is left unwaxed it will develop a green film like copper does. The longer bronze is let go, the harder it will be to get back a nice bronze finish. Waxing once a year in late spring, once weather warms, is a good idea.

If you could help with this important task, please call Al Pratt at 616 485-4144 or reply on the contact page of our website or by using the reply envelope enclosed in this newsletter.

### Rockford Area Historical Society Rockford Area Museum (RAM)

PO Box 781  
Rockford, MI 49341  
Museum Phone: 616 866-2235

Website: [www.rockfordmuseum.org](http://www.rockfordmuseum.org)

#### RAM location:

21 S. Monroe  
Next to City Hall and the  
Chamber of Commerce

### HISTORICAL SOCIETY BOARD AND OFFICERS

**President:** Terry Konkle

**Vice President:** Bob Winegar

**Recording Secretary:** Jennie Griffey

**Corresponding Secretary:** Carla Blandford

**Treasurer:** Dianne Skiver

**Trustees:** Joan DeMaagd

Jerry DeMaagd

Floyd Havemeier

Jon Stamp

**Programs:** Janette Konkle

### MUSEUM STAFF

**Director:** Al Pratt

**Lead Archivists:** Jennie Griffey, Pat Frye

**Catalogers:** Wendy Gulbis, Candy DeForest

**Video Editor:** Ian McCormick

**Newsletter Editor:** Joan Bogart

**INTERESTING:** It is hard to believe that less than six months ago, I had never heard of "Social Distancing". Now it controls my life.

### MEMBERSHIP REMINDER

#### Your membership is important to the RAHS & RAM

If your address label on this mailing does not say "**LIFE**" or **2020** on the right hand side, your membership needs to be renewed.

**LIFETIME** members receive member benefits to OVER 1100 other museums throughout North America through our affiliation with **NARM** (*North American Reciprocal Museum Association*) AND they NEVER have to renew.

Use the contact form and envelope included with this newsletter to correct your contact information, send us a message, make a donation, renew your membership or upgrade to a **LIFETIME** Membership now. Your continued support is sincerely appreciated.

Thank You

### ROCKFORD AREA HISTORICAL SOCIETY (RAHS) AND ROCKFORD AREA MUSEUM (RAM) NOTES

#### ALL DECISIONS REGARDING RAHS OR RAM ACTIVITIES ARE BEING MADE WITH THE SAFETY OF OUR VOLUNTEERS AND GUESTS BEING OUR TOP PRIORITY.

*We met our goal for the SpartanNash Direct Your Dollars program, earning us a \$1,000 donation for which we still need to submit paperwork.*

*We intend to repeat the process but cannot accept additional SpartanNash receipts now. Please save them for us if you can.*

*At this time, no regular Historical Society meetings are scheduled for the rest of the year.*

*Additional artifacts will no longer be accepted until some time after we reopen and are confident that we can take items in safely. Please hold them for us if you can.*

*The Rockford Area Museum is closed until further notice.*

*Watch our website ([rockfordmuseum.org](http://rockfordmuseum.org)) for updates as they occur.*