

# Chautauqua Historical Society

*Preservation is progress, may we be worthy stewards...*

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Summer 2018

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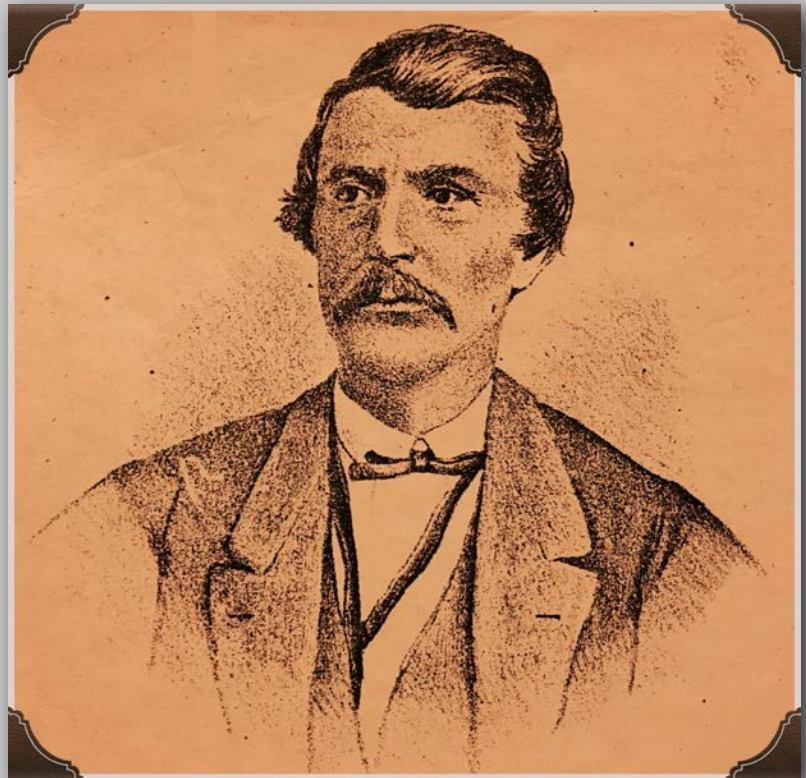
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## Can you help us identify this garden area?

At the end of Springfield Avenue is a cul-de-sac with a green space in the middle. Even going past slowly on foot or by bicycle, you might miss what is there. Driving past this area in a golf cart with her granddaughter this summer, Rose Tomlinson noticed the patch of overgrown ivy, ferns and foliage, (see the top photograph to the left). As they drew closer, they both noticed two rocks in the middle, something they had never noticed before. Are the stacked stones a structure, a sculpture? Was this recently added or something that has always been there? Around the stones is an overgrown planting bed outlined in two or three courses of stacked stone, some fallen. Tim Tomlinson pointed out the two symmetrically placed pine trees, that were clearly a part of this planting. He offered a rough estimate as 50 years ago for their planting, which could be the 1960s.

Rose checked in with several fellow Chautauquans, but no one seems know the origin.

Do you have the story of this planting bed and these stones? We would like to record the story and restore the area. Who built it and when? Was this planting bed developed in in honor of someone or was it for beautification of our valley?

Please stop by the archival center or contact Rose, Tim or a member of the historical society with your memories or story of this intriguing find.

### **The Chautauqua Historical Society**

The mission and purpose of the Chautauqua Historical Society is the preservation and enhancement of the historic traditions and culture of New Piasa Chautauqua, Chautauqua, Illinois; the encouragement of historical research on the Chautauqua community and nearby historic districts; the publication of historical brochures, pamphlets, and other written material on New Piasa Chautauqua, remaining permanent assemblies and chautauquas in other parts of the United States and the national Chautauqua movement; and the establishment of an educational program to inform the Chautauqua community and the general public of the historical and educational value of New Piasa Chautauqua.

Melissa McCanna, editor, writer

Printed at Principia College. Color printing is funded by Piasa Bluffs Assembly members. The newsletter is printed two times a year. The Chautauqua Historical Society is an Illinois nonprofit corporation.

## Miscellaneous

### Chautauqua Celebrates the Illinois Centennial, 1818 - 1918

This year, 2018, marks the 200th anniversary of the founding of our great state of Illinois. Looking back at the 100th anniversary of Illinois' founding in 1918, we see that Chautauqua marked the centennial with a special program book(right) and speakers to mark the occasion.

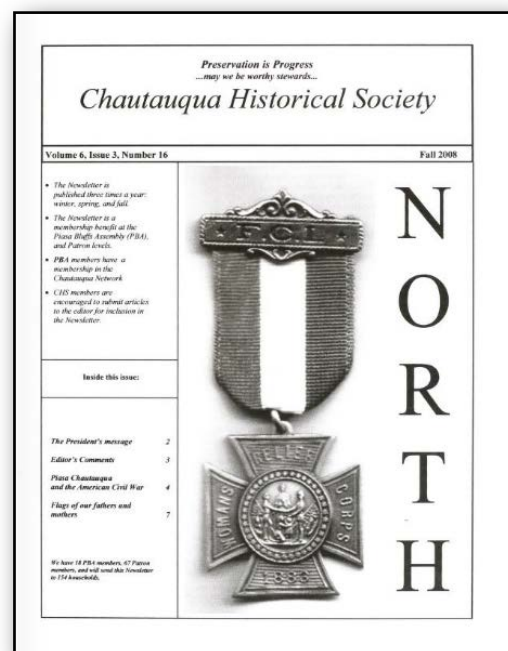
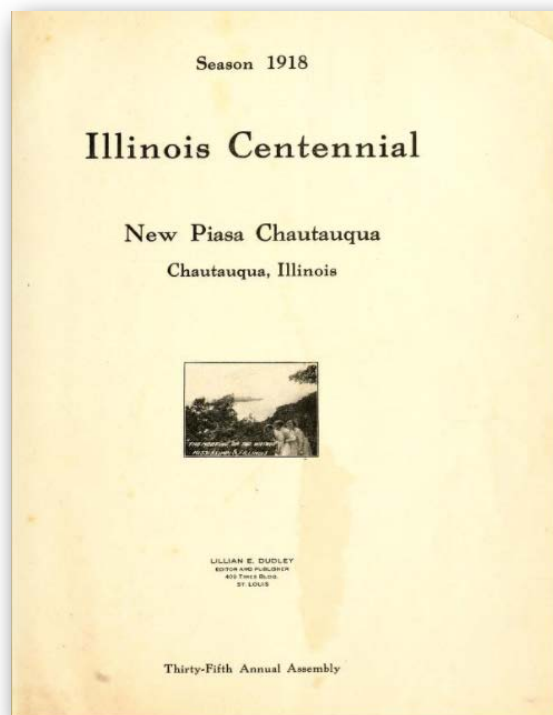
### Your Local Newspaper

The local newspapers from the Alton and St. Louis areas are critical to the research and writing of this newsletter. Online subscription services offer access to over 100 years of local papers, and access to these papers is vital to discovering our people and their stories. The key to this information is a robust local newspaper. Reporters cover news and events, school board meetings, town meetings and sporting events. Early newspapers documented, not just this news, official meetings and politics, but also the daily comings and goings of our citizens. They even told of visitors to cottages at Chautauqua, vacations, programs, birthday parties and card parties. These seemingly minor details enrich our understanding of life in early Chautauqua. Support your local newspapers today!

### Chautauqua and the Civil War

An interesting companion to the article about Col. A. F. Rodgers in this issue, is found in the Fall 2008 issue of the Chautauqua Historical Society newsletter. Tim Tomlinson wrote an article that profiles early Chautauqua founders who fought in the Civil War. The most amazing part of this story is that we had representatives of both the North and the South working together and building Chautauqua, side by side. The founding of Chautauqua occurred just 20 years after that devastating Civil War. Among those highlighted in Tim's article was Col. A. F. Rodgers.

Stop by the Archival Research Center to review a copy of this very interesting article.







## Boating at Chautauqua

In the early 1900's much of Chautauqua's life centered around the river. Fishing from boats and along the river bank was popular. Steamboats made numerous daily trips to the valley destination from St. Louis and Alton. Some early postcards show as many as three of these large riverboats docked at one time on the riverfront. But other, smaller boats also plied the river and offered regular transportation and excursions to Chautauqua for visitors. Two names turn up in the Chautauqua program books for excursion boats and their captains - Captains J. O. Brock and George Fries.

**The Batchellor**—Captain Brock is the faithful pilot and owner of the Batchellor. He is here to help boost Chautauqua. He makes regular trips to Grafton every day in the week at 9:30, except on Sunday, when he leaves the dock at 8:30 a. m. to accommodate all who wish to attend services at Grafton. Trips at 7:30 each evening. Beautiful river trips. For other information see Captain Brock, at the river front.

The two photo postcards that illustrate this article were purchased several years ago by the author via online auction. One day, during research in our early program books, the brief articles, seen above and below, were connected with the photos in the author's collection. Suddenly, via these images of early Chautauqua, the simple paragraphs spring to vibrant life!

### BOATING

For the season of 1919, motor boats and rental row boats will be in charge of Captain Brock and Mr. George Fries. Motor boat trips between Chautauqua, Grafton and other points will be made daily. Moonlight motor trips can be arranged for as desired.

Patrons will find both of the above gentlemen to be experienced pilots and very accommodating and every attention will be given, to the complete satisfaction of those wishing to give boating parties on the river.

Captain Justin O. Brock of Grafton owned a motor launch named the Bachelor (seen on top of this page), and it offered daily trips on the river. It is most likely that Captain Brock is seen piloting the Bachelor in this photograph as it approaches the shore at Chautauqua. Information about the excursions he offered appeared yearly in the program books and local papers between approximately 1914 and 1928. Captain Brock offered daily trips between Chautauqua and Grafton, and popular night cruises. Many reminiscences found in local papers mention Captain Brock and his moonlight cruises as a significant part of the Chautauqua experience. A most interesting mention of Captain Brock, appears in the book "Frederick Oakes Sylvester: The Artist's



Encounter with Elsay” by Paul O. Williams. In the chapter discussing the death of Sylvester, we read “...Captain Brock’s motor-launch had set out from Elsay up river to the confluence of the Mississippi and Illinois Rivers, where Mrs. Sylvester and Takuma Kajiwarra sprinkled his ashes on the water.” Takuma Kajiwarra was a good friend of Frederick Oakes Sylvester and a noted photographer. Sylvester died in 1915. Ralph Osborn’s 1985 centennial history of Chautauqua indicates there are several stories regarding who discovered the fire that completely destroyed the Chautauqua Inn in 1919. One of these stories has Captain Brock motoring in his boat the Bachelor, and after seeing the fire, he repeatedly blew the boat’s whistle to alert Chautauquans to the danger.

Captain Brock died in 1929 at age 62 and the headline of the obituary calls him a “River Man.” He is buried in the beautiful Elsay Cemetery in the hills above the village. And so ended a the life of an interesting man who added so much to our community and a delightful era in the life of our valley.

The other river boat that served Chautauqua was named the Irene, as seen in the photo above. You can see that name painted on the hull and on the flag held by a happy passenger. This is the boat piloted by George Fries who named the launch after his wife. He provided river boat service and tours to Chautauqua visitors with his craft. George Fries led a fascinating life as detailed in his 1948 obituary in the Alton Evening Telegraph. In his early years, he was a circus performer, connected with Barnum & Bailey Circus as a trapeze artist. Later he played in the circus band. George, and later his son, was widely known for his work as a musician with his own band. Ralph Osborn’s 1985 history of Chautauqua indicates that his 15 piece band played at the Chase Hotel in St. Louis and the Admiral river boat. He became a professional diver on the river. He also worked as a news photographer with a St. Louis daily newspaper. His river excursions on his boat Irene are mentioned in his obituary, as well as the fact that he and his wife owned and lived in a cottage in Chautauqua from 1911 - 1942. This cottage was located on the site of the current all purpose court.

The connection of these most interesting photographs with a few simple paragraphs from our program books led to the amazing details found in local newspapers that illustrate an exciting time in our history. The identification of these boats, their fascinating captains and their role in early Chautauqua life is critical to telling our story. The smiling passengers and the beautiful day on the river make this chapter of our history come alive!



## Colonel A. F. Rodgers

*Alton, Illinois, October 14, 1914*

*"There is now living in the Upper Alton section of Alton a quiet, unassuming gentleman of handsome physique and soldierly bearing whose history is one of heroic achievement and patriotic adventure rarely equaled..."*

From the article "The Hero of the Wreck of the Independence. Some Incidents in the Life of Colonel A. F. Rodgers, A Veteran of the Mexican and Civil Wars" W. T. Norton, Journal of the Illinois State Historical Society, October 1, 1914.

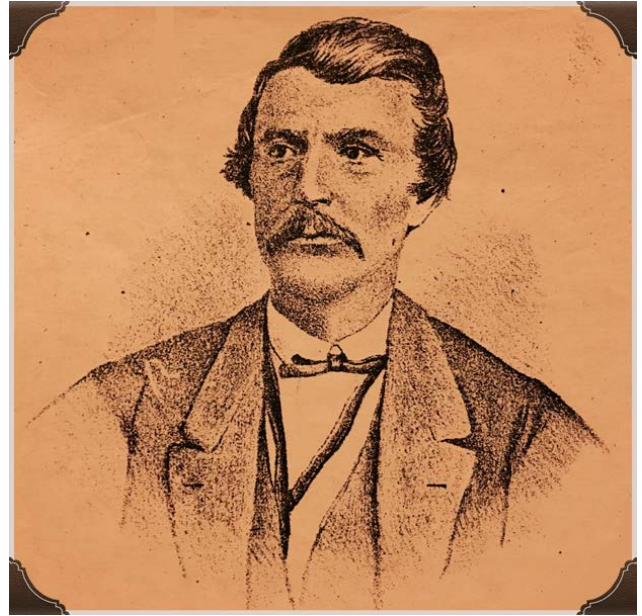


Chautauqua, throughout its history, has been fortunate to count among its residents, men and women who lived fascinating full lives, but perhaps none were as interesting as Colonel A. F. Rodgers (1827 -1922).

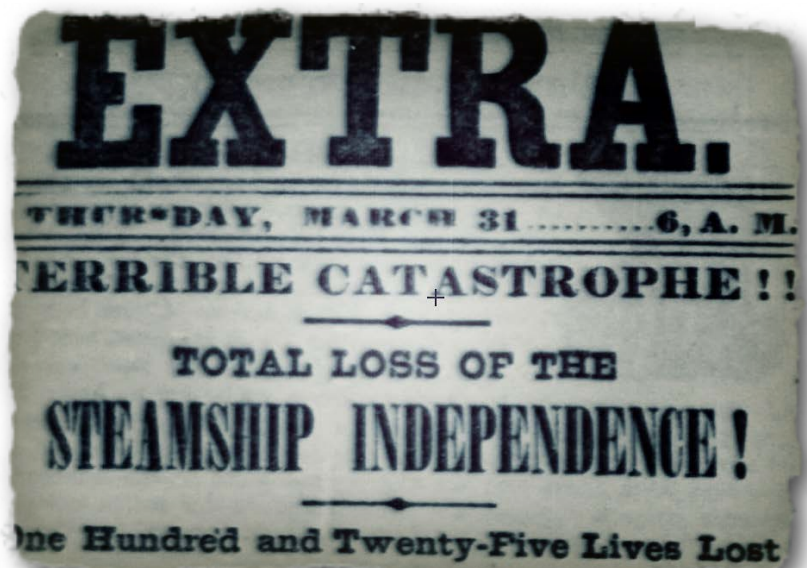
Andrew Fuller Rodgers, most often referred to in print as Col. A. F. Rodgers, was a member of an early pioneer family in Illinois. He was the eldest son of Reverend Ebenezer Rodgers, one of the earliest Baptist ministers in the state. A hero of two wars, Rodgers first served as a captain in the Mexican war (1846-1848) in the Second Illinois Infantry, participating in several notable battles, including the Battle of Buena Vista. He enlisted in Alton at age 18 and returned to Alton after the war, but soon left again for the California gold rush. He often returned to Alton for visits.

On one of his trips back to the California gold fields from Alton, the steam ship Independence upon which he was a passenger, burned and sank. Col. Rodgers saved two lives and struggled to get to a nearby island, where he was later rescued. Later in the early 1900s he was visited by the individuals he had saved. This was widely documented in local newspapers. He later returned to Alton, and in 1860 married Jane Delaplain, of a prominent early local family.

Rodgers participated the Civil War, joining the 80th Illinois Infantry as a captain, he earned the rank of Colonel during his service. He was wounded in the Battle of Perryville (Kentucky), but recovered and returned to serve again. He was later captured by Confederate troops, and spent time in several Confederate prison camps, including the notorious Libby Prison. He was released as part of a prisoner exchange while in a prison camp in Charleston, South Carolina. His release may have been prompted by a



Public domain sketch of Andrew Fuller Rodgers. Wikimedia Commons.



Headline from the Daily Alta California, March 21, 1853. California Digital Newspaper Collection, Center for Bibliographic Studies and Research, University of California, Riverside, <<http://cdnc.ucr.edu>>

telegram (seen below) sent by Abraham Lincoln! The U.S. Congressman from Illinois, William Ralls Morrison requested that General Butler work to secure Rodger's release. When no action was taken, Morrison contacted President Abraham Lincoln for assistance.

After the Civil War, Colonel Rodgers continued an active life in his community of Alton. He spent one term representing the Alton area in the state legislature in 1870. He lived on his family farm, which is the land occupied by the State Hospital.

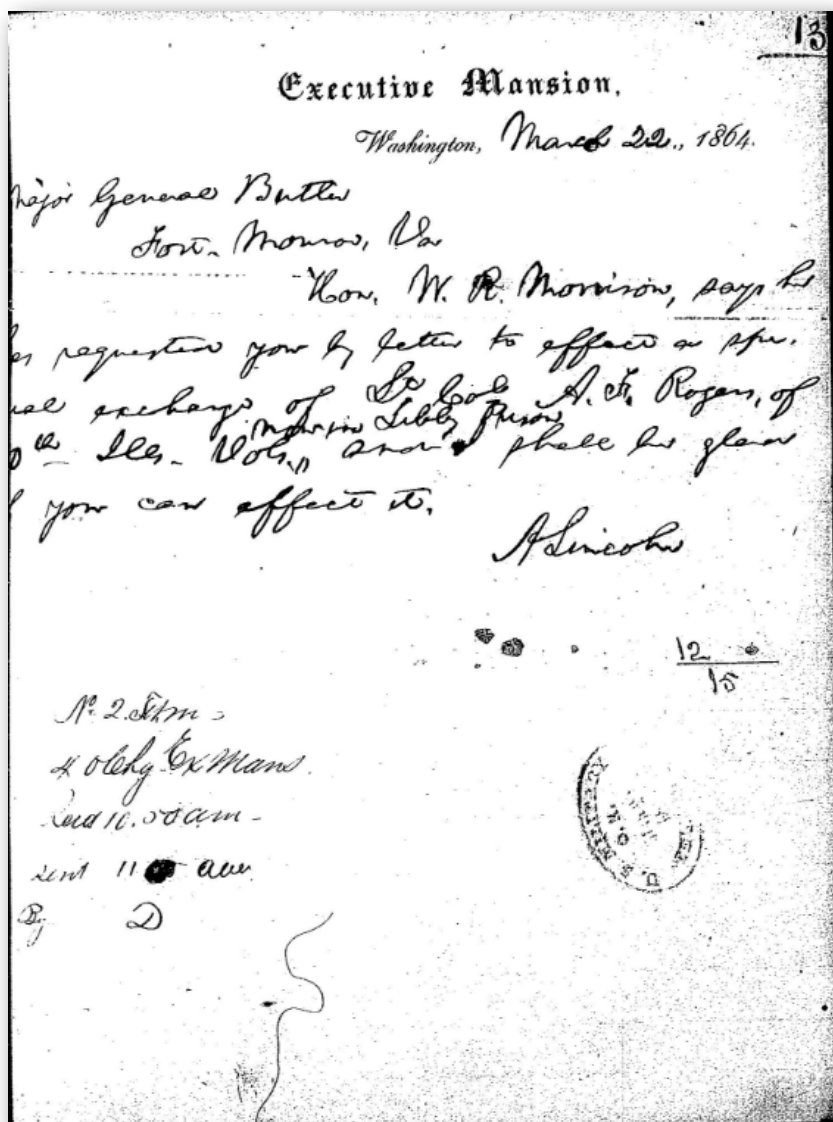
He was an early and active participant in the Piasa Bluffs Assembly, his name appearing as a director in the 1893-1894 program book. From early leasehold history, his first cottage lease was in 1892, and it appears that it was in the family until the 1980's. Today the cottage is owned by the Beckwith family.

The Alton Telegraph offers many stories detailing the active life of Col. A. F Rodgers. He celebrated numerous reunions with fellow veterans of the Battle of Buena Vista and the Civil War. He was active in numerous veterans organizations, including the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR), a civil war veterans group. In 1893, articles in many newspapers indicate that Col. Rodgers was shot in a political quarrel with a former senator! He loved to fish, and newspaper articles detail the time he caught 300 pounds of fish, another later article tells that when almost blind, he still went fishing by putting bells on his lines. Later we read that at age 90, he had an eye operation, and was thrilled to be able to see again.

Colonel Rodgers died at age 94, in Alton, on January 20, 1922. He is buried with a simple grave marker in the Upper Alton Cemetery, known as Oakwood Cemetery at the time of his death. His life was full and exciting and he made Chautauqua richer because of his long involvement here.



This was the Rodgers cottage on Bluff Avenue, currently owned by the Beckwith family.



National Archives Collection, Washington, D.C., Record Group 107, Telegrams sent and received by the War Department Central Telegraph Office. Digital image courtesy of the Lincoln Telegram Project, College of Education, North Carolina State University.



## The Archival Research Center

The Archival Research Center (ARC) in the Kentucky Home was open every Wednesday, Friday and Saturday morning from 10:00 to 12:00 during the season. In preparation for the 2018 season, the cottage boxes were renumbered and reorganized, historic signs specially hung, flowers were planted at our entrance and fresh painting was done.

This year, we were fortunate to have two Chautauqua interns who scanned and organized our many documents. Without their dedicated work, we could not achieve the progress we are making with gathering, digitizing and organizing our valuable materials. Two important examples are that 24 years of Channels have been digitized and organized and present leases have been scanned and also placed in archival books. Check in at the ARC to see which Channels and program books are missing from our collection.

We have begun the exciting process of collecting photos and gathering information and organizing them into archival albums as well as digitizing them. We welcome your contributions! Be sure to stop by and see our progress on these accessible albums, in the following important areas:

- **Chautauqua weddings and baptisms.**
- **Children's Day Programs.** If anyone has programs from pageants before the 80's we welcome them! We will make a digital copy and return your original.
- **Present and past veterans.** We would like the branch, rank, dates of service, where the veteran served and when retired from service; we have a blank form that will help you organize this information. A photo of the veteran in uniform is so important to telling his or her story.
- **Memorials.** We are gathering photos and information to document various memorials around the grounds. This includes benches and trees given in honor of Chautauquans. Please stop by and check our progress and share your knowledge and photographs
- **History and photos of our important buildings:** We are just starting to develop collections on Town Hall, Kentucky Home, Yellow Balloon and Play School, the Chapel, the Administration Building and the Wood Shop.
- **Teen Play and Community Theatre** program books and information.

Come by and see our exhibit of photographs documenting the evolution of the Memorial Hillside, where our flag ceremonies take place.

Again, we ask each family to record family memories of your time in Chautauqua and put them in your cottage box in the center.

We are already planning new projects and exciting exhibits for our 2019 season. Join us as a volunteer, we welcome your assistance or as always just stop by in season to see what is new!

**Mary Ann Weyforth**  
Director, ARC

Summer 2018

