

# TIMELINE OF ROCKFORD'S HISTORY



## 1818-1832

In 1818, Illinois becomes a state, and by 1828 the Winnebago Native Americans have given up their land to white settlers. After their defeat in the Blackhawk War on August 27, 1832, all Native Americans move west across the Mississippi River.

## 1834

Germanicus Kent (b. 5/31/1790) and his slave Lewis Lemon travel from Huntsville, Alabama, and join Thatcher Blake of Oxford County, Maine (b. 3/16/1809) on the western bank of the Rock River in Illinois. Kent constructs a saw mill while Blake takes up farming.

## APRIL, 1835

Daniel Shaw Haight arrives on the east bank of the Rock River and builds a cabin. Haight and Kent compete with each other to try and outsell the surrounding land and convince settlers to move to their side of the river.

## OCTOBER, 1835

Dr. Josiah Goodhue, the founder of Rush Medical College in Chicago, gives Rockford its name by observing the rock ford (a shallow path) that allows settlers to cross the river. He officially moves to Rockford in 1838.

## 1837

An economic depression wipes out Kent's money holdings, and seeing no future in Rockford, he moves to Virginia in 1844.

## SEPTEMBER 6, 1839

Lewis Lemon, Kent's slave, receives his manumission (freedom) papers from Kent. Lemon chooses to remain in Rockford and lives the rest his life here selling vegetables until his death in 1877.



## FEBRUARY 25, 1847

The Rockford Female Seminary is first chartered February 25, 1847 and is later renamed Rockford College in 1892. The Seminary is established to prepare female students for the field of education. In 2013 Rockford College becomes Rockford University, offering a variety of courses and majors.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection. Colonial Dance at Rockford College (previously Rockford Female Seminary. Photograph taken in 1847). Accession Number 88.122.612.

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## 1852

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The first train, pulled by the engine Pioneer, arrives in Rockford. The rail connects Galena and Chicago, encouraging businesses to set up shop in Rockford.

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## SUMMER, 1855

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John H. Manny constructs reapers in Rockford while Cyrus McCormick produces reapers in Chicago. McCormick accuses Manny of stealing ideas for the reapers from him and sues Manny. Manny receives help with his case from Abraham Lincoln and eventually wins the case against McCormick.

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## AUGUST, 1862

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Rockford is chosen as the site of a temporary training ground for soldiers in the Civil War. The training grounds are called Camp Fuller and one of the most famous female soldiers trains there. Jennie Rodgers enlists under the name Albert Cashier and serves in over forty battles during the war without any members of her regiment learning of her true gender.

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## 1865

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Robert Tinker begins building his Swiss Cottage along Kent Creek, inspired by his 1862 European tour. He later serves as mayor and helps establish the Rockford Park District in 1909.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection. Tinker Cottage (c. 1890-1920). Accession number 88.122.612



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## 1870

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John Nelson makes a seamless sock on an automatic sock machine for the first time. The iconic red toes and heels were added in 1932 to distinguish the Nelson Knitting Company's products from imitators. The socks gain popularity as workers in the factories made "sock monkey" toys out of them.

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## JULY 17, 1872

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The Rockford Public Library is organized and the main library opens in November 1903 thanks to a Carnegie grant.

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MAY 11, 1877

Tragedy strikes downtown Rockford when the dome of the new courthouse collapses during construction. All but the front pediments fall through the floor. Seven workers are killed instantly, two died later, and an additional twelve workers are seriously injured. The new courthouse is completed in 1878.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Courthouse after it was rebuilt (1878). Accession number 83.45.100

1880

The Rockford Street Railway Company receives the right to transport Rockfordians all around downtown. Horses soon replace mules as the major mode of transportation. The company switches to electric-run cars under new ownership in 1889.

1888

The train depot for the Illinois Central Rail is completed.

1892-1893

The national financial panic hits Rockford. Many businesses are forced to close and Rockford citizens suffer economic difficulties

JUNE 3, 1903

President Theodore Roosevelt visits Rockford to dedicate Memorial Hall in memory of all Winnebago County veterans.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Memorial Hall (dedicated by Teddy Roosevelt 1903). Accession number 81.136.142



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1904

Rockford's first "skyscraper" is built for Ashton's Department Store on North Main Street.

1905

Roland Shumway, the founder of a nationally-known seeds and gardening supply company, donates land on East State Street to the city of Rockford for an open-air farmers market.

1909

The first transaction of the Rockford Park District board is to buy 123 acres to develop Sinnissippi Park.

1910

The Hess & Peterson store in Rockford has grown to become one of the largest dry goods businesses in the state.



1917

Rockford obtains the right to construct a World War I training camp on the south side of town. Camp Grant trains around one million people from all over the country and is one of only sixteen training camps ever built in the U.S.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Parade of soldiers in Rockford after Armistice Day 1918 (Camp Grant 1917-1918) Accession number 2008.36.95

1918

Rockford's Swedish American Hospital opens.

SEPTEMBER, 1918

The Spanish Influenza strikes Camp Grant. So many soldiers die of this highly infectious disease that one higher ranking officer commits suicide over the enormous death toll. 323 Rockford civilians die of the influenza as well.

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## 1919-1921

The short-lived Blackhawk Park Zoo is in operation, with the star attractions being a Bengal tiger, a monkey, bison, and Big Babe the elephant.

## JULY 3, 1926

Boxer Sammy Mandell of Rockford knocks out "Rocky Kansas" to win the World Lightweight Boxing Championship. The fight lasts for 10 rounds in the pouring rain in front of 20,000 fans at Comiskey Park.

## SEPTEMBER 14, 1928

A tornado rips through south Rockford and the city is flooded. 14 people are killed, along with 30 city blocks, 4 factories, and 360 homes being destroyed.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Flood after 1928 tornado. Accession number 76.31.5



## EARLY 1930s

Rockford is hit hard by the Great Depression. The Works Progress Administration (WPA) is a government program that helps citizens find work. Rockford WPA employees build West and East High Schools.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Aerial View of East High (built by WPA workers). Accession number 2009.50.16

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## 1932

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Herbert Hoover visits Rockford while on his Presidential re-election campaign, just a few days before he loses to Franklin D. Roosevelt.

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## 1935

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James Henry Breasted, professor of Egyptology at the University of Chicago, dies of a throat infection. This Rockford native was born in 1865, and is known for finding Alexander the Great's palace grounds and being the second person to enter King Tut's tomb. Although rumors stated that his death is in connection to the curse of King Tut, the 3 doctors who witness his autopsy find nothing supernatural.

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## EARLY 1940s

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Camp Grant reopens as part of Rockford's contribution to World War II. Local businesses and citizens help produce military machinery and 16,000 Rockfordians enter military service.

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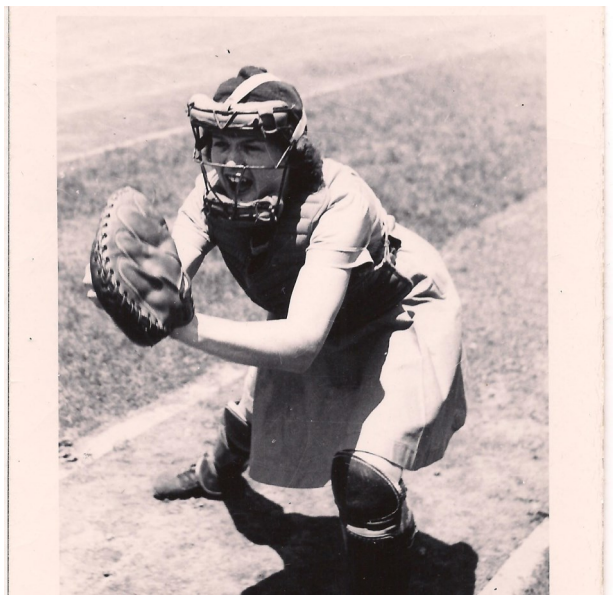
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## 1943

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The first season of the All American Girls Professional Baseball League opens. The Rockford Peaches became a national sensation due to their successful records. They were based at Beyer Stadium located a mile from downtown Rockford . The last season for the Peaches is in 1954.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Peaches player in action (WWII-1954). Accession number 2006.27.34



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## JULY-NOVEMBER 1945

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A city-wide pandemic of polio hits Rockford. Over 300 cases were confirmed, and 80% of those who die are children. In an effort to stop the spread of the disease, Rockford improves its garbage disposal, sprays for mosquitos, and accepts medical help from the Camp Grant medical personnel. A vaccine is developed in the late 1950s.

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## 1958

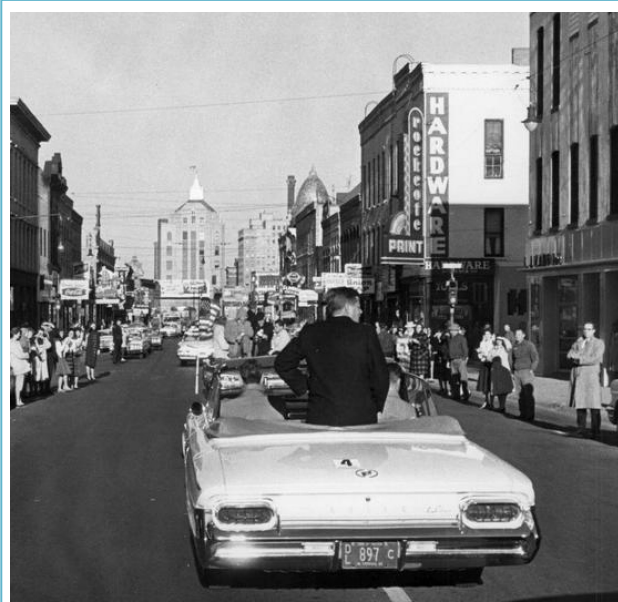
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The Illinois Tollway Authority authorizes the newly built tollway to pass to the east of Rockford. Businesses and new development are drawn further towards the expressway during the 1960s and 70s, changing the face of Rockford.

# TIMELINE OF ROCKFORD'S HISTORY

## 1960s

Rockford surpasses Peoria to become the second largest city in Illinois. An unprecedented number of births are recorded in the city during the 1950s, and many new families move to the city for the plentiful manufacturing jobs.



### 1960

Presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy makes a campaign stop in Rockford two weeks before the election. Despite the crowds of people who come to see JFK, Richard Nixon easily carries the majority of votes in Winnebago County.

JFK rides along E State St on October 24 on his way to a campaign event at the Coronado Theatre. This photo was published in the Rockford-Register Republic.

## APRIL, 1967

A tornado rips through Belvidere. Rockford helps their neighbors with relief efforts.

## 1970s

Rockford's industries feel the pinch of increased foreign competition, oil prices, and automation of jobs people once performed.

### 1972

Lynn Morley Martin wins a seat on the Winnebago County Board, beginning her political career. She serves in the Illinois House of Representatives, Illinois Senate, and the U.S. House of Representatives, in addition to being appointed as the U.S. Secretary of Labor in 1991.

### 1974

Midway Village Museum and the blacksmith shop open to the public for the first time.

### 1976

His Majesty King Carl XVI Gustaf of Sweden visits Rockford.

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1978

Inspired by his trips to Japan, John R. Anderson recreates a Japanese-style garden on the site of his home, which is later donated to a non-profit organization. The garden is recognized as the finest Japanese garden in North America in 2004.

1980

Rockford Congressman John B. Anderson runs as an independent for President of the United States. He is defeated by Ronald Reagan, but has the highest number of votes (6.6%) for an independent since Teddy Roosevelt.

Photograph is part of the Midway Village Museum Collection.  
Congressman John B. Anderson. Accession number 2006.21.331



1988

At Midway Village, the Old Doll's House Museum opens, along with the Aviation Gallery and the Carlson Education Gallery.

1989

Charles Box is elected as the first African-American mayor of Rockford. Mayor Box funds new public programs, such as police bicycle patrols, improved garbage dumps, increases recycling to 35%, and promotes new shopping districts on the east side of town.

1980s-1990s

Rockford experiences a rebirth, which brings an explosion of new retail spaces along East State Street.

1999

Hamilton Standard and Sundstrand Corporation merge, creating Hamilton Sundstrand. In 2012, Hamilton Sundstrand merges with Goodrich Corporation to become UTC Aerospace Systems



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2001

Jane the T-Rex is found in the Hell Creek Formation in Montana. Her 21-foot skeleton is put on display at the Burpee Museum in Rockford after 4 years of preparation. In March 2007, Jane is nominated as one of Illinois' Seven Wonders.

Photograph taken from Wikimedia Commons

2005

Homer the Triceratops is also discovered in the Hell Creek Formation in Montana. His exhibit at the Burpee Museum, Homer's Odyssey, opens in May 2013 after 8 years of preparation.

2007

The Rockford area is part of a flooding disaster zone. Up to 70,000 people are without power.

2014

The Midway Village Museum is celebrating its 40th anniversary. The current museum campus sits on a 137-acre campus, with more than 15,000 square feet of exhibition space and 26 historical buildings to explore. The newest exhibit, Many Faces, One Community, is in the final construction phase and is set to open later this year.