

“ ‘Culture’ Came to Lockport in 1850.” *Lockport Free Press*. “Old Canal Days” Special, 15 June 1978.

‘Culture’ came to Lockport in 1850

This is the latest in a series on the history of Lockport by John Lamb, a resident of Lockport and professor of history at Lewis University. He is president of the Illinois Canal Society.

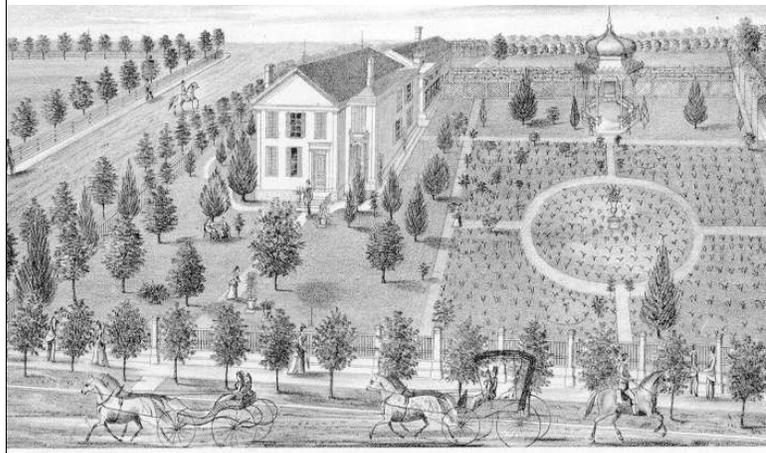
During the decade of the 1850s, Lockport grew and prospered. Traffic on the canal was on the increase and in that decade, Lockport was incorporated.

What was the village like at that time?

In early October of 1850, it was visited by Sir Arthur Cunyngham, an English Army officer on leave from his regiment in Canada. Shooting snipe was Cunyngham’s sport and in the area west of the Des Plaines River now known as the “Lockport Prairie,” he bagged 40 pair in three hours. The bird still nests there but has become rare thanks to such marksmen as Cunyngham.

He wrote about his trip in “A Glimpse of the Great Western Republic,” where he describes the experiences of an English aristocrat in Lockport:

“While staying at this hotel, I asked the landlady to allow one of her domestics to clean my boots. She answered that the gentleman who generally fixed them was not in the house, but added, ‘I guess



The culture and status of the Early Lockport community are clearly illustrated in this drawing of one of the area estates. (Illustrated Atlas of Will County 1873)

you’ll find the fixings in the cupboard and no one will hinder you from doing it yourself.’

“There was not the least bit rudeness in her manner; indeed, she was invariably attentive. I merely mention this as a trait of the national equality preserved in this free and independent soil. It is needless to add that without scruple I at once followed the injunction she gave me.”

Cunyngham then goes on to recount some of the political talk going around the hotel’s public table.

“At the public table at Lockport, a boy, about 13 years of age, entered freely into conversation respecting the merits of the different men who were about to run in the next election for some government offices in the next town (presumably Joliet).

“This embryo politician was condemning one person for coalescing with the Whigs and another for too highly favoring the Democratic Party.”

But it wasn’t only politics that absorbed Lockport’s interest in

1850. Culture—with a big “C” – was also in evidence. On October 16 the *Lockport Telegraph* noted that the Western Philharmonic Association would be holding a meeting; all who could sing or play were urged to attend. The advertisement also appeared in newspapers in Will, Kane and DuPage Counties.

On Oct. 17, the Philharmonic Association gave a concert in Lockport under the direction of its president, E.L. Bartlett, and “the music was superior,” noted the *Lockport Telegraph*. However, one newspaper commented on “a presumably tone-deaf editor of the Lockport Telegraph: “We are no judge of the “divine science” but presume that the music was superior. We must however take a friend’s privilege of criticizing some of the other performances of the president of the Association. We

confess that the extraordinary labor of the leader on this occasion (furious beating of the air with hand or fiddle bow) distressed us and others remarked the same.”

“But we were absolutely shocked at the bad taste of the gentleman when, in his closing speech to the assembly, he arose, made his bow and then deliberately took his tobacco box from his pocket and crammed his cheek full of ‘fine cut ‘ and ejected a quantity of brown saliva over the quality below before making a speech.

“If music elevates and refines, it ought to work to make a change in the habits of the president of the Philharmonic Association.”

After such a blast Bartlett shook the dust of Lockport from his artistic feet and took the

Western Philharmonic Association with him. But nothing was lost when the musical citizens of the town formed their own group the next week and elected a certain Dr. Larned their president.

Dr. Larned was a physician learned in the latest scientific concepts of his art. He was an Allepathic Practitioner much interested in electro-biology. In that line, he had acquired and was eager to use the “Electro - psychodynamic” treatment. This, it seems, had worked all sorts of miraculous cures for a wide range of nervous diseases. It had shocked the bejabbers out of “deafness, rheumatism, paralysis, stammering, weak and defective eyes, sick and nervous headache, neuralgia, epilepsy, palpitations of the heart, spinal and all other nervous afflictions.”

At his office—“the first door south of the Methodist Church,”-cures were to be had for mental derangement or insanity. Also treated by the doctor were amaurosis, asthma, asphyxia, chronic diseases of the heart, all diseases of the urinary tract, dropsy, scrofula, cancerous tumors, gout, stiff joints, weakness of loss of voice, pain in the side, and fits or convulsions of all descriptions. All would yield, claimed the doctor, to the march of science and the “psycho-dynamic” treatment.

It is not known whether the lame and blind were made whole by the Allepathic Practitioner, but it does serve to illustrate the old truism that one generation’s latest scientific cure is the next’s arrant quackery.