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M.E. JACOBSON.

Bishop Hill, 1846

(1941)

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



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Bishop Hill

1846

ILLINOIS HISTORICAL SURVEY



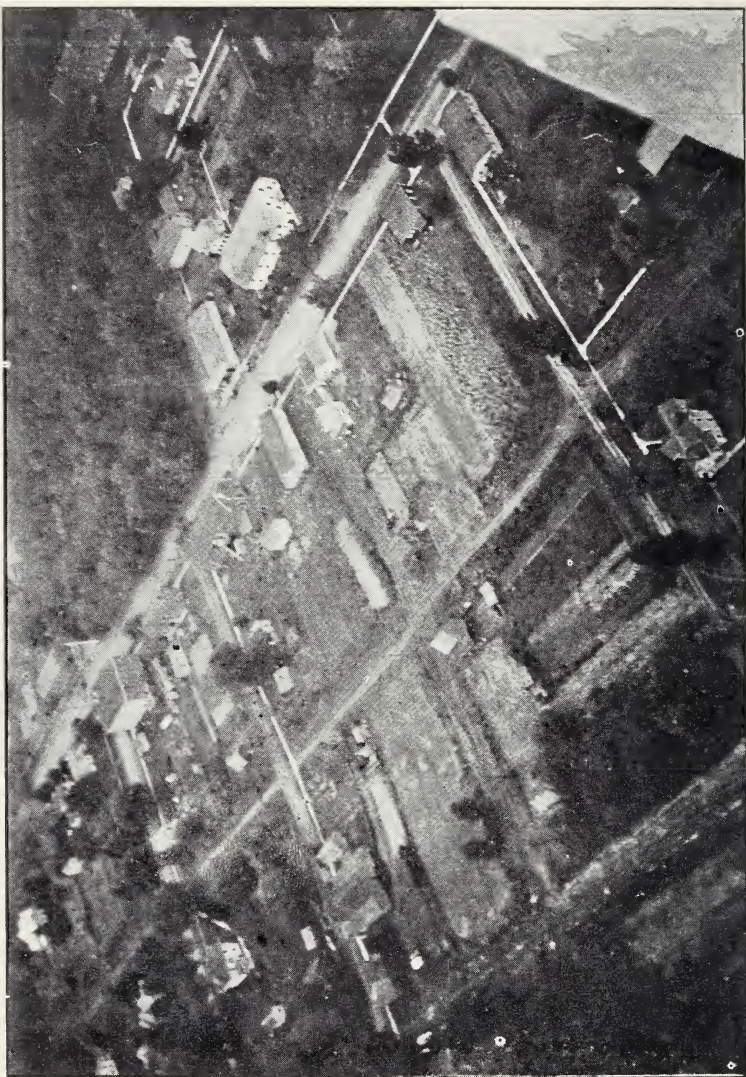
Bishop Hill

1846

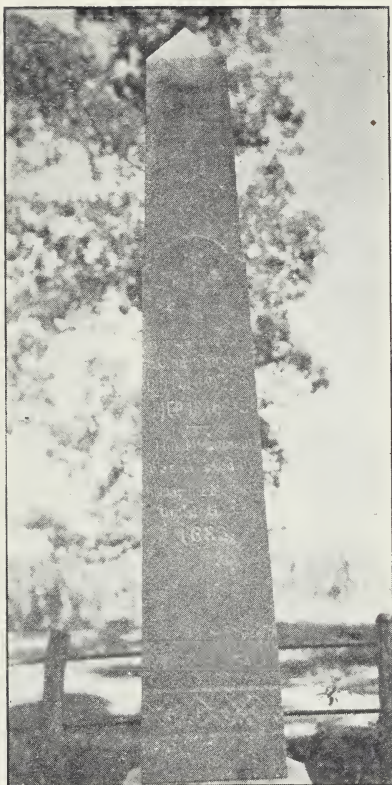


PHOTOS BY
RUSSELL TRALL NEVILLE
KEWANEE, ILL.

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BY
BISHOP HILL OLD SETTLERS ASSOCIATION



AIRPLANE VIEW OF BISHOP HILL



RED OAK MONUMENT

(INSCRIPTION)

**HEREABOUT RESTS
50 MEMBERS OF B. H. COLONY
WHO DIED 1845-47.**

**THIS MONUMENT WAS ERECTED BY
REMAINING MEMBERS OF B. H. C.**

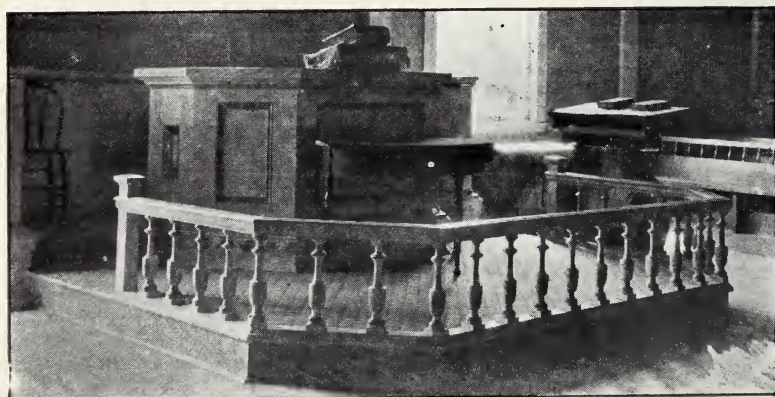
1882



STREET SCENE



COLONY CHURCH



INTERIOR CHURCH

BISHOP HILL

x 1846 »

By MARGARET E. JACOBSON



THE visitors who come to Bishop Hill often wonder about the origin of its name. If their wonder leads to query, townspeople explain that Biskops Kulla was the Swedish parish in which Eric Janson was born, and that the name, translated, was given to the American town which Janson founded.

A hundred years ago, just as now, people were struggling for freedom. To a certain group of Swedish people this struggle focused first, in disapproval of conditions which existed in the Established Church, and second, in a desire to worship unmolested as their consciences directed.

Leadership presented itself in the person of Eric Janson, whose following grew so rapidly, and became so purposeful, that he was able to plan their emigration from Sweden to found a community in America. To make this financially possible each colonist sold all of his possessions, and contributed the proceeds to a common treasury, which provided for transportation across the Atlantic as well as sustenance and support throughout the entire existence of the colony.

Seafaring was hazardous, and many are the tales of hardship, courage, resourcefulness, and tragedy which bespeak the steadfastness of purpose which activated these emigrants. The groups varied in size from less than fifty to as many as two hundred. The voyages took variously six, nine or twelve weeks, while five months was consumed by the passage of one party. Deaths at sea occurred, vessels were wrecked, and some brave souls who left their native land with high hope never reached the shores which lured them with the wish for a new home.

In 1846 the first of several parties arrived in New York and undertook the tedious



journey remaining, by canal, the Great Lakes, by wagon and by foot overland to Victoria, and then to Red Oak Grove in Henry County, about three miles west of the town site, chosen later, which was to become Bishop Hill. Colonists continued to arrive in larger and smaller groups. With the passing years travel became easier so the last comers, in 1854, covered the entire distance from New York to Galva by rail, as the C.B.&Q. railway was that year, completed to that point. These additions to the population of Bishop Hill made it eventually a town of eleven hundred citizens.

Shelter, and a place of worship, were the first concerns of these pioneers. A few log-houses and tents, used temporarily, were supplanted by a number of dug-outs about eighteen feet wide and from twenty-five to thirty feet long, with a fireplace at the rear wall, a roof of rails, sod and earth, and a door and two small windows at the front. Two tiers of berths were built along the side walls. Each dug-out accommodated from twenty-five to thirty persons.

The first church was called the tent church because the structure, built in the shape of a cross, large enough for a thousand persons, was made of logs and covered with canvas. A school for adults was held in the tent church, while the children were, at first, taught in mud caves. English was taught in all the schools. The tent church served until 1848 when it burned, and a new church was erected, which is known today as "the old Colony Church."

Bodies, souls and minds thus cared for, the colonists bent their efforts to providing food and clothing, and to establishing a system of living conducive to a successful outcome of their ambitious venture.

Agriculture was the principal occupation. Oxen broke the prairie, and Indian corn, wheat and oats were raised. Men, women and children engaged in the primitive processes of the enterprise. And the efforts of these laborers prospered. The original sixty acres of land grew to twelve thousand, as part of the property worth a million dollars before the dissolution of the colony.



The community aspect of the organization meant not only that goods were jointly owned, but that life was lived on a group basis rather than an individual one. In 1849 "the big brick" was begun and it was finished the next year. Two hundred and forty-five feet long, and four stories high, it consisted of ninety-six dwelling rooms, exclusive of six halls, and the communal kitchen and dining-rooms in the basement. Here eighteen women worked in the kitchen and twelve waitresses served the food. The bell, now calling Bishop Hill children to school, summoned the colonists to their meals. Though fare was plain and sometimes scanty in the early days, grace was always said or sung, and the tables were clean and attractive, being dressed three times weekly with fresh linen which had been raised, spun and woven in the colony. An early version of the modern apartment house, the big brick was the home of many families until it burned, in 1928.

Other large buildings were constructed to provide dwelling rooms. In order to complete the housing of all as soon as possible, these buildings were apportioned, one room to a family. Construction work was facilitated by the making of kiln-dried brick which began in 1848 and by the use of saw mills.

In 1854 "the Steeple Building" which houses the colony-made clock was erected, and in 1860 the brick school-house, still serving its original purpose, was built. The hotel, the tannery, the brewery, the dairy, the bakery, the blacksmith shop, the carriage and wagon shop, the paint-shop, the hospital, the mill, were all necessary to the economic life of the community, and for all phases of work there were experts—carpenters, shoe-makers, tailors, tanners, spinners, weavers, harness-makers, turners, clock-makers, broom-makers.

Fortune did not smile continually on this colonial experiment. Hard labor was daily fare, stern discipline, and the will to go on, despite reverses. In 1846 and '47, malaria and dysentery caused a great many deaths, and in 1849 a dreadful plague of Asiatic cholera attacked the settlement. Fifty who died of cholera were buried in Red Oak where a monument

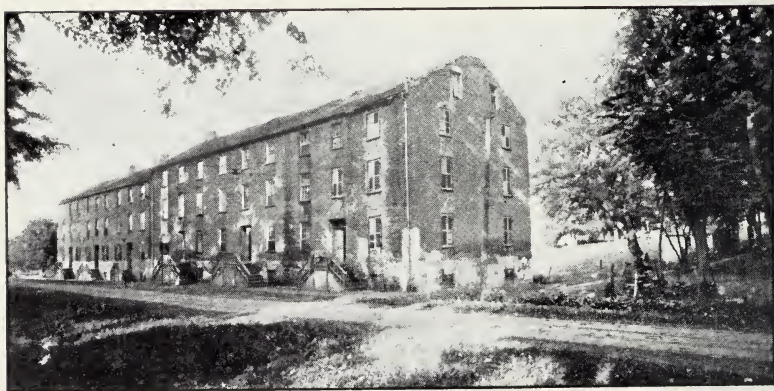


stands, dedicated to them. Also in 1849 an expedition was fitted up to try further fortunes in the California gold rush, but the fortunes were not realized.

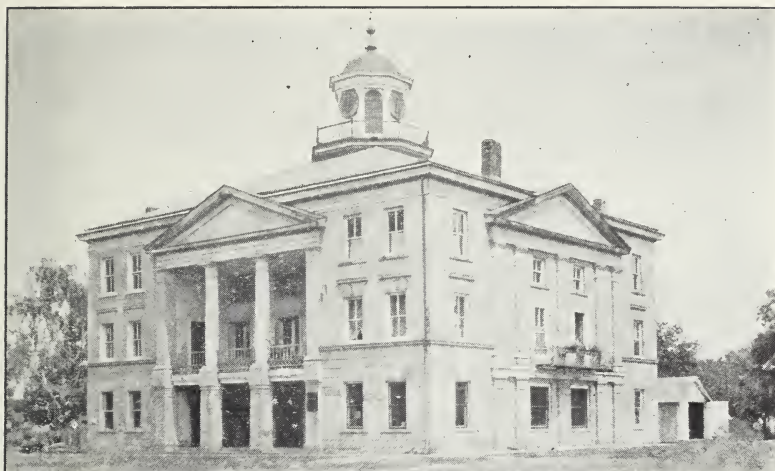
Many and varied circumstances led to the dissolution of the colony. All business ventures did not succeed which caused dissatisfaction. Some of the religious fervor of the early days had spent itself. The Civil War was reducing the number of young men as they responded to President Lincoln's call for troops. Times were critical and people were restless.

The decision concerning the dissolution of the colony and the division of property became effective in 1861.

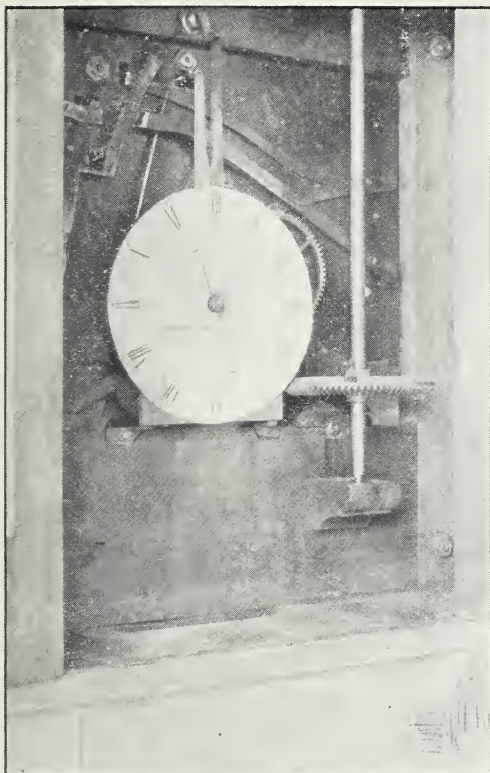
The many casual visitors who see the little village of tree-lined streets, well-kept lawns, and unusual old buildings, doubtless remember it, if at all, for its past. To those who go to the old brick postoffice for their mail, Bishop Hill is home.



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STEEPLE BUILDING



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TOWN CLOCK



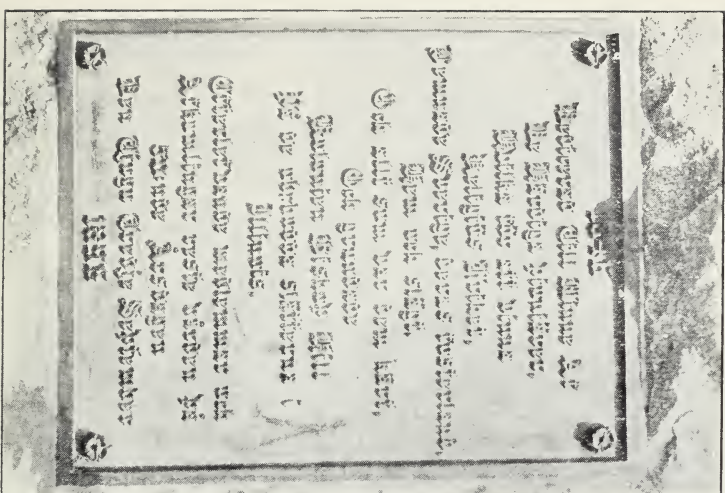
SCHOOL HOUSE



BJORKLAND HOTEL



COLONY BUILDINGS



SWEDISH INSCRIPTION

1246

DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF

THE HARDY PIONEERS
WHO, IN ORDER TO SECURE
RELIGIOUS LIBERTY
LEFT SWEDEN, THEIR NATIVE LAND,
WITH ALL THE ENDARMENTS
OF HOME AND KINDRED
AND FOUNDED

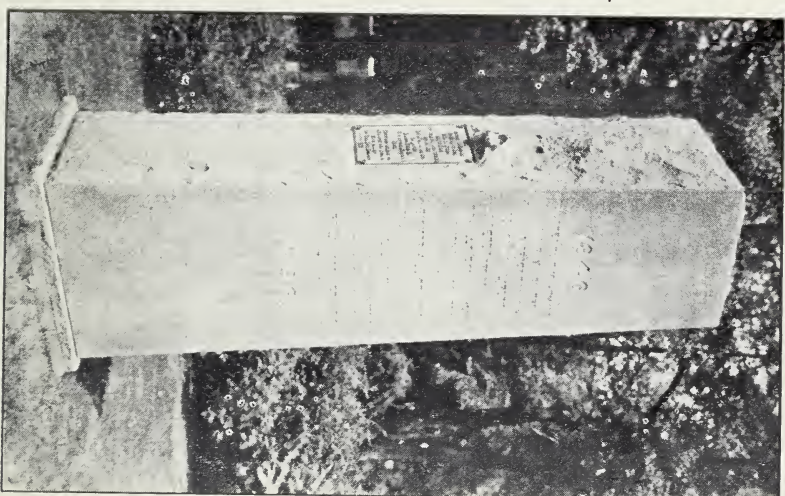
BISHOP HILL COLONY

ON THE UNINHABITED PRAIRIES OF
ILLINOIS

ERECTED BY SURVIVING MEMBERS
AND DESCENDENTS ON THE
50TH ANNIVERSARY,
SEPTEMBER TWENTY-THIRD

1296

---Translation of inscription on
Old Settlers Monument.



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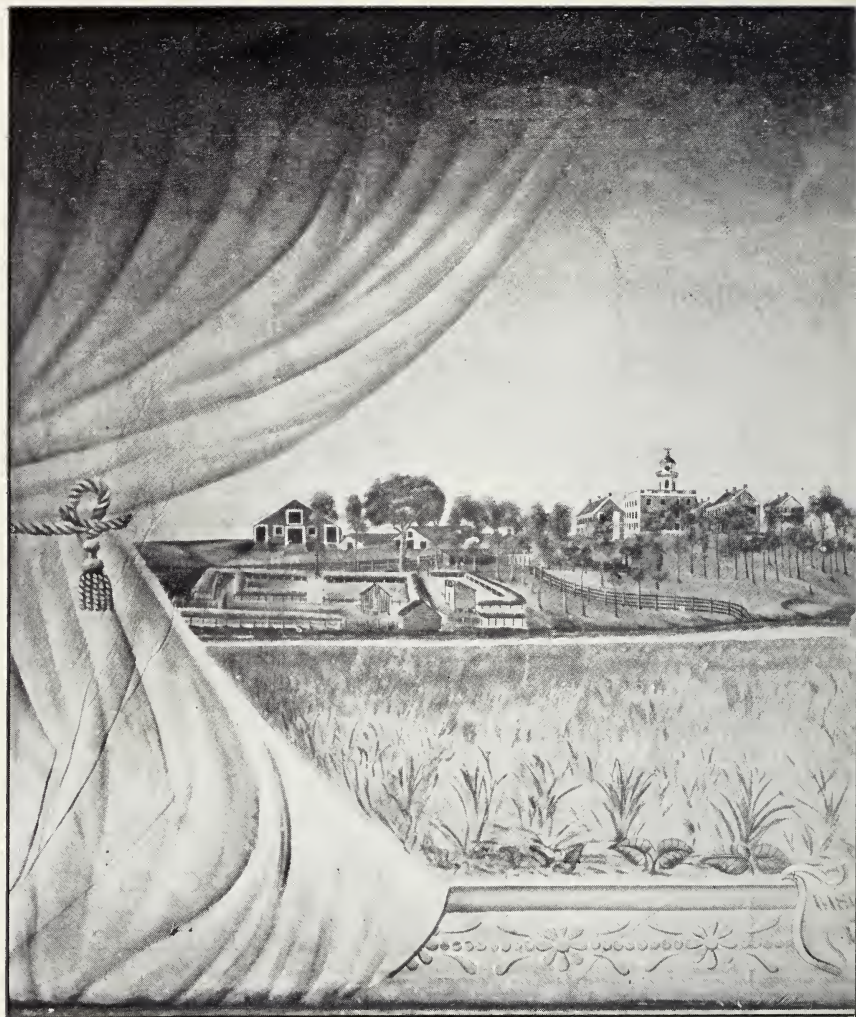
•
LUMBER

COAL

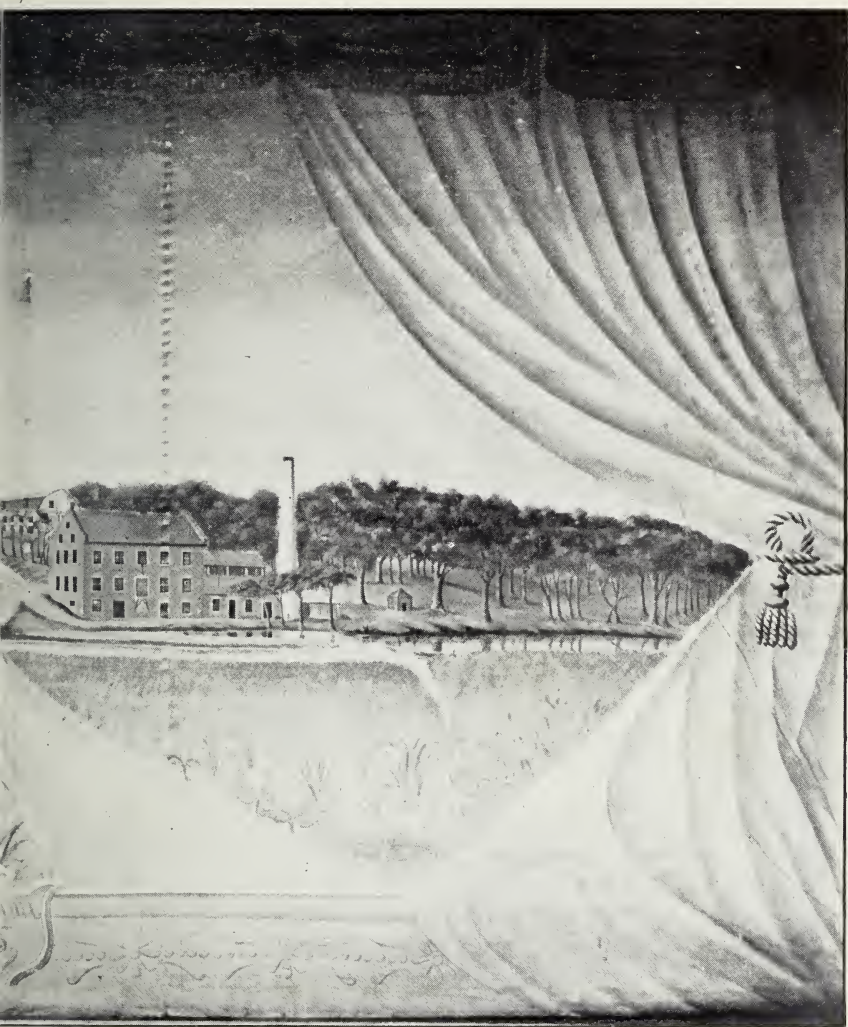
BUILDING

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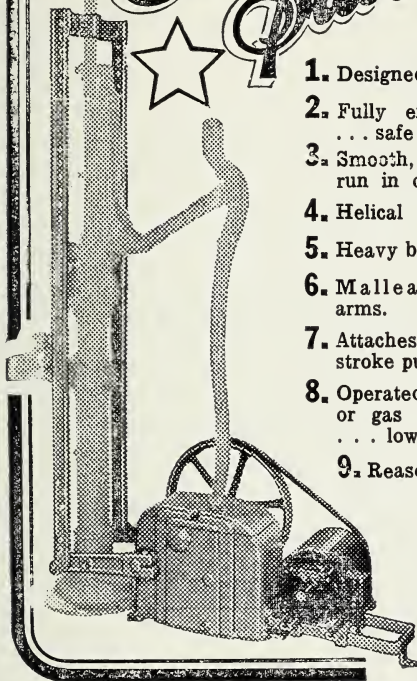
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