

# The Rockton Grove

A letter from Joyce McVey Blackmore, June 12, 1981, reads:

*There was a beautiful stand of stately elm trees in the village [of Rockton, Wisconsin] called "The Grove." I have no idea how many trees were there at one time, but there were many.*

*These trees were on land owned by Van S. Bennett, who ... was the largest landed proprietor in Vernon County, owning about 2300 acres. He was a member of the State Assembly in 1869–70 and of the State Senate in 1884 to 1886.*

*He laid out and platted the village of Rockton in 1873, donated land for the cemetery and for the school, and was responsible for having the road built across "The Island" where the Kickapoo River was divided, built a large mercantile store, and was responsible for many other things.*

*Two men of the Rockton community—Christian Selback and Eli McVey—built a "Swing" out of wood in "The Grove." A horse pulled the swing around, and children rode it for 5¢ a ride.*

*The first large gathering of people ever assembled in this part of the county was on the 4th of July, 1868, in "The Grove." One old lady shed tears*

*of joy to see so many people gathered together "in the woods." Hartwell Allen, the first county school superintendent, was the day's orator.*

*On August 13, 1939, Rockton's first homecoming picnic was held amongst these trees. A very large crowd attended. There was a program of speeches and music. People visited, played horseshoes, and watched Oscar Sayles' team of oxen perform.*

*It was all so successful that it was decided to make it an annual affair on the second Sunday in August. Later it was held on the lawn of the old "Brokaw House" across the road where many of the same elm trees were.*

*Eventually, in the late 1950s, the annual homecoming was discontinued because there were no longer enough of the older residents of Rockton left to do all the work necessary.*

*Also, by this time, many of the famous old elms had succumbed to lightning, wind, or disease. Many are still left, though, so one can see their beauty and realize their importance to this pioneer community.*

Source: Joyce McVey Blackmore, Phoenix, AZ