

Rockford was first settled in 1834-1835 by [Germanicus Kent](#) , [Thatcher Blake](#) , and [Lewis Lemon](#) ,

who came from

[Galena](#)

and established themselves on the west bank of Rock River, and Daniel Shaw Haight, who founded a settlement on the east bank. (Lemon, a slave, later bought his freedom, but stayed in the area as a truck farmer.) Before the Civil War, the area was dominated by settlers from New York and New England, while Southern Illinois was dominated by settlers from Kentucky and Tennessee, many of them former slave owners.

Halfway between Chicago and [Galena](#) , the community was briefly known as Midway, but quickly became known as Rockford, because of the excellent

[ford](#)

across the

[Rock River](#)

. A post office was established in 1837. The settlement was incorporated as a village in 1839, and chartered as a city in 1852.

The first weekly newspaper was published in 1840 and the first successful daily newspaper appeared in 1877. Between 1890 and 1930 the city had three daily newspapers. Rockford Female Seminary was chartered in 1847, became [Rockford College](#) in 1892, and became fully coeducational in 1958. Its best known graduate is

[Jane Addams](#)

(RFS Class of 1881), the founder of Chicago's

[Hull House](#)

and recipient of the

[Nobel Peace Prize](#)

in 1931. Rockford Public Library, the second such institution in Illinois, first opened to the public in August 1872; the library's first dedicated building, a

[Carnegie library](#)

, was completed by 1902.

Winnebago County War Memorial



Coronado Theater



The number of impressive movie palaces built in the 1920s and early 1930s speaks to the thriving economy Rockford had at the time. The [Coronado Theater](#) was the largest and most expansive of all these movie theaters in Rockford, complete with an orchestra pit, double balcony, highly ornate design and full array of theatrical and stage equipment. Coronado Theatre, "Rockford's Wonder Theater", was listed during 1979 to the [National Register of Historic Places](#)

. Other remarkable theaters in Rockford included the Midway, Times, and State theaters.

Rockford was well known for its [elm trees](#) , being the reason for its nickname, the Forest City. But in the mid 1950s an epidemic of [Dutch Elm disease](#) more or less wiped out the population of Elm trees. However, Rockford is still heavily lined with trees. Of note are the parks and boulevard street layouts in certain parts of the city. Neighborhood parks and wide common grassy/forested areas forming boulevards are found in the older parts of the city. Many of the parks were part of the street layout put down in the late 1890s, early 1900s when subdivisions of that era were created. These parks typically were an entire city block, or in some cases larger. They would typically have a bowery, and sometimes a cement-lined pool. The boulevards tend to be in slightly newer subdivisions built in the 1920s.

The 1960s saw expansion of the manufacturing segment in the area. Near the outskirts of Rockford in [Belvidere](#) , a [Chrysler](#) car factory was built in 1965 which initially assembled the Chrysler Newport and other large cars and now produces the [Dodge Caliber](#) and similar cars. Sundstrand, now [Hamilton Sundstrand](#) , a division of [United Technologies](#) also expanded during this time period making aircraft parts.

Starting as early as the 1990s Rockford has had the ignominious honor of being listed at times as one America's worst cities by the [Rand McNally](#) corporation and [Money magazine](#) , sometimes being ranked one of the top ten worst cities. This may have been due to the lack of jobs and high number of outdated or closed factories. Crime on the west side of town was endemic, with huge areas of old established neighborhoods in extreme blight. The homicide rate in these areas was quite high. Many houses were vacant with no one wishing to buy them. The city government has developed many programs to attempt to address these problems and has seen some success.

Source: Wikipedia