

LABOR TEMPLE

*Mutual respect
usually
governed
Consolidated
union
relationship*

Through his many years as a Consolidated Papers Inc. papermaker, Ezra Maeder emerged as a labor and civic leader. He received public recognition November 4, 1969, when he retired after 46 years at Consolidated and was named the area's Citizen of the Year. He had been vice president of the Central Labor Council and Papermakers Local 187 financial secretary.

He served as a Wisconsin Rapids alderman, chairman of the city's sewage commission, a director of Riverview Hospital Association and chairman of the board of Riverview Manor.

Maeder was also a director of the Labor Temple Association from its inception and influential in establishing a permanent meeting place for labor.

After the first successful paper workers union was formed in 1919 at

the Consolidated mill, various local facilities were used for union meetings, including a second-floor room in Tony Peerenboom's west-side grocery store and the old Eagles Club on the east riverbank.

When it came time to tear down the Eagles clubhouse to make way for Mead's riverside park, said Maeder, the unions needed another place to meet.

The Labor Temple Association was formed in 1946 because local unions felt greater solidarity could be secured through a central place of their own to hold business and social activities, according to the *Daily Tribune*.

Officers of the Labor Temple mentioned in a 1950 story were Ezra Maeder, president; C.J. Baumel, vice president; Jack Sullivan, secretary; and Harold Sultze, treasurer.

The "Baldwin Building," a large former house near the Consolidated mill, was purchased as a potential "labor temple" site.

But, said Maeder, "when the time came, Consolidated didn't want us to do that because a law had been passed in the state that you had to be so many feet away from a church to get a bar."

The "English Lutheran" church was too close at that time at Roosevelt and Fourth Avenue. The Baldwin site was sold back to Consolidated, and the search resumed.

"We had a chance to buy the old creamery building," said Maeder, "but they [the union local] didn't seem to want it."

A second-hand store at Second Avenue and Jackson Street was considered, but Preway union representatives then objected that the store was too close to Consolidated, Maeder said.

The final choice and one that endured was Lloyd's Recreation. The bowling alley and former hotel on the East Bank, now at the end of the Jackson Street bridge, was owned by Lloyd Franson. It was purchased May 26, 1949, for \$65,000.

Local attorney "Red" Billmeyer wrote up articles of incorporation based

on those of a labor temple in Superior, said Maeder. The name chosen was "Tri-City Labor Temple Association," in the belief that union locals from Port Edwards and Nekoosa also would use the building.

The Labor Temple was dedicated November 12, 1950.

Another demonstration of union solidarity that year, mentioned by the *Tribune*, was the "garage strike" of auto workers against 14 garages. It was settled after five weeks.

Maeder recalled the pulp workers and papermakers strike of 1957.

He said the unions normally got along well with Consolidated. But problems arose this time when some union representatives couldn't relate to company representatives, particularly personnel manager Leo Barrette.

The result, Maeder said, was a strike that shouldn't have happened. "We never worked there long enough to make up the loss of pay," said Maeder.

He has fond memories of George W. Mead, the former Consolidated president, whom he called a "wonderful man" who treated the workers well.

Though he was one of the first paper-mill operators to accept unions, Mead originally opposed unions. At the start of the company's first strike, in 1919, he refused to bargain with the union, and most of the workers walked out.

Apparently, a few who weren't sympathetic to the strike stayed in the mill.

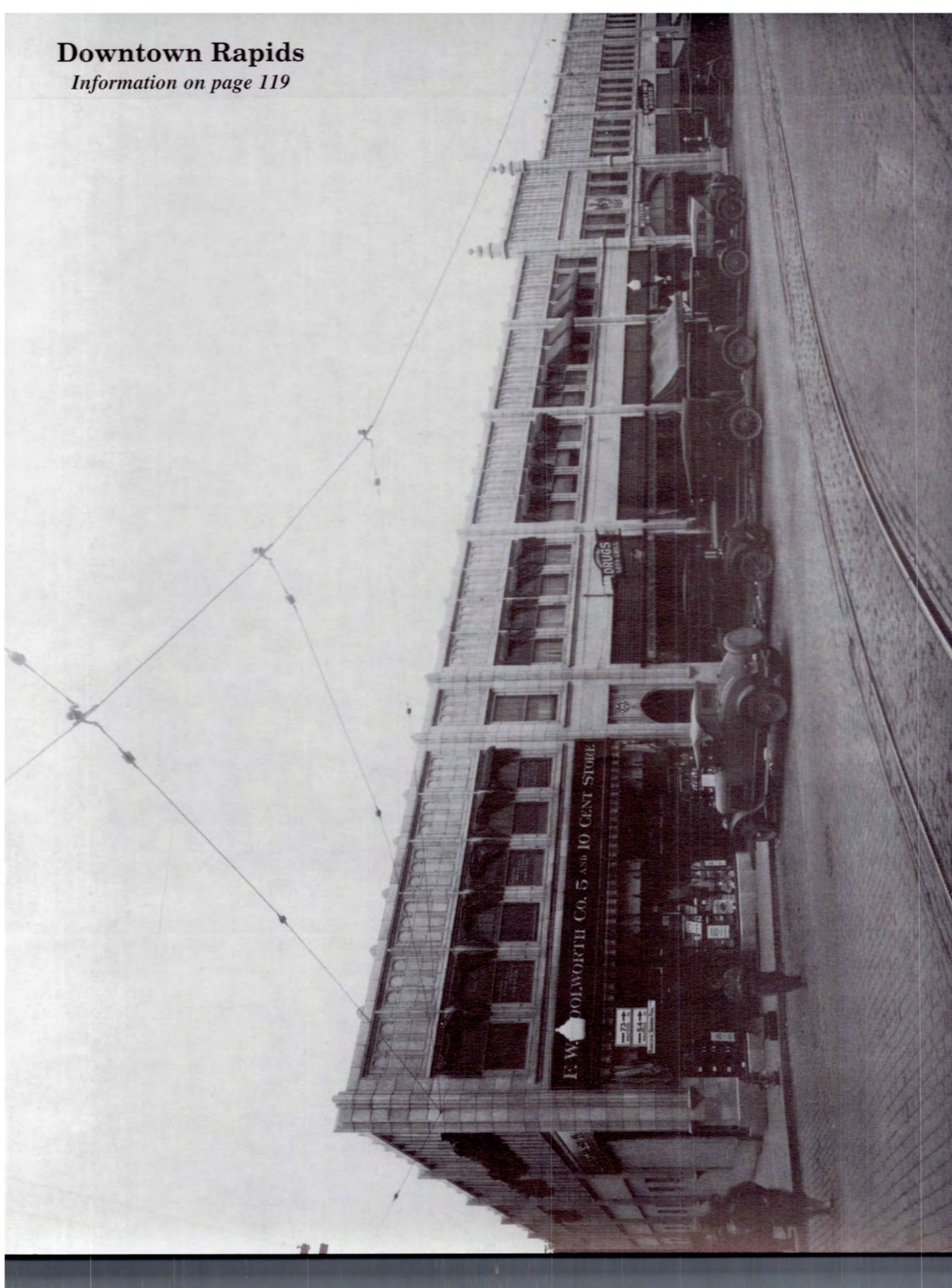
It was Charlie Panter, according to legend, who kept the boilers going, without which the mill would have physically shut down. Had temperatures fallen low enough, the boilers might have been damaged.

For his loyalty, Mead told Panter, he had a lifetime job.

When the strike was settled amicably in a few days, the rest of the men went back to work. Not a few of them also spent the better part of a lifetime job with Mead and his paper company.

Downtown Rapids

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After VJ-Day

Above: Looking west on Grand Avenue from Grand Avenue Bridge. The West Side looked about the same from 1926-1978. *Below:* Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Company float headed east on the Grand Avenue Bridge. Hotel Witter in background. (SWCHC)





U.S. POST OFFICE

WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WIS. - 5

1940s Landmarks

(Above: SWCHC. Below: RCM.)



DIXON HOTEL, WISCONSIN RAPIDS, WIS.—38



Above: Snake Dance on East Grand Avenue, 1959, from the *Ahdawagam*. Below: The Daly Block, 1935, appeared similarly in 1959. The area was converted to riverside park land. (RCM)





Above: General Business Committee of the Wisconsin Rapids Common Council meets at New Berlin, November 5, 1966, to plan municipal destinies. *Below:* Wisconsin Rapids' "old" City Hall, West Grand Avenue, 1950s. (SWCHC)



MEAD'S MAIN STREET MALL 1926

After Consolidated president George W. Mead settled the strike of 1919, he turned his gaze forward into a future many of us came to share.

While Consolidated expanded its local industrial plant, Mead reshaped the downtown into the thoroughly modern shopping district we remember as old-time Rapids.

On November 20, 1919, the *Daily Tribune* reported that Consolidated would buy the MacKinnon property at the northwest end of the Grand Avenue bridge, along with the Pomainville, Briere, Sutor and LeFebvre properties on the next block west. Mead said he was considering erecting a new office building in the area.

He also would take out the railroad switch track crossing Grand. The only tracks remaining in the west side downtown would be those used by the street car.

Besides the historic properties already mentioned, an even older "shed" known as the Garrison-Jackson store would be removed for a major remodeling of Nash Hardware. Once the principal west side establishment, the Garrison building had housed the Centralia school on its second floor.

In December 1919, the *Tribune* said the Daly Music Co. would erect a new A.F. Billmeyer-built store on the

"Rossier lot" opposite the Dixon Hotel. A jewelry business would be added.

Construction began in December 1921.

In 1926, I. E. Wilcox had Billmeyer erect an addition to the Daly building using the east wall in common. It would be used as a clothing store.

The merger of the west side Bank of Grand Rapids and the east side First National Bank culminated in the 1921 opening of the new First National Bank.

Designed by Childs & Smith of Chicago, the Grand Avenue bank was said to fulfill a dream of the founder, J.D. Witter, Mead's father-in-law.

On Oct. 18, 1922, the new Grand Avenue Bridge was dedicated. It had been built with political help from Mead's brother-in-law, I.P. Witter, then a member of the state Legislature.

The most important downtown development was the \$127,000 Mead-Witter block, designed by L.A. De Guere and E. Erol Smith, and built in stages from 1924-25.

Woolworth's, on the west-end ground floor, was the first business to open—in November 1924, the latest in the company's 1,370-store chain of "five-and-dime" stores and one of 50 Woolworth's opened that year.

Abel's men's clothing store opened in March 1925.

Other original occupants were A&P, Whitrock and Wolt drugs, Western Union, Rapids Bakery, Eron Plumbing and the Fritz and Pete pool hall.

The second floor of the Mead-Witter building was used for offices.

Another downtown shopping center, the Consolidated-built River Block, was completed shortly after the Mead-Witter Block. It was eventually removed to make way for the present River Block office building.

Nash Hardware, in 1924, rebuilt its store at the southeast corner of First Avenue and West Grand Avenue.

Nash Hardware would later be transformed into the Montgomery Ward building which stood at the site of what is now a Consolidated parking lot.

The 1920s also brought reconstruction on the east side. The April 20, 1920, *Tribune* announced the opening of the local branch of the 297-store J.C. Penney chain under the management of Joseph G. Hagen in a building owned by John E. Daly, one that later became Brauer's clothing store.

In 1924, Penney's moved west across the street to the John E. Daly Block, where Penney's remained and expanded into adjacent floor space to the size it was in the 1960s.

A 1925 article mentioned Bob Brauer's new clothing store and the remodeling of the former Brauer corner by John E. Daly. It also noted that the Sugar Bowl had put on a new front.

Huntington's garage was to enjoy the construction of a new building while others were being wrecked to complete "court house park" and an extension of Second Street North. Other "old buildings" on First Street North were to be removed to make room for a new Winona Oil Co. station.

More old buildings adjoining the Eagles Club "detracted" from the appearance of the east bank and were to be removed by Mead, clearing the way for later parks.

The recently demolished [1994] west side Daly Music store had been built around 1920. The event has a unique connection to George Mead.

In the early 1980s, Francis Daly told me that he and his mother had gone to Mead's office to discuss whether to borrow money to build a new store.

"Mr. Mead sat and listened all morning," said Daly.

As the music lady and industrialist conversed, messengers came and went, carrying notes that Mead read and signed.

After due deliberation, Mead advised Mrs. Daly, "Go ahead and borrow."

Later, said Daly, he found out Mead's attention might well have divided. He had given the Dalys his attention at the same time that, even while they spoke, Consolidated workers in his mill had gone out on strike.

DOWN TOWN

It's 10
p.m. any
night.

Do you know
where
your
children
are?

They're "downtown."

One look at that anonymous asphalt jungle and you can guess why juvenile crime has arisen as the motif of the nineties.

A cruise by the stations of our Temple of Materialism franchise and you comprehend how so many kids today prefer good deals to good values.

Shopper City, 1994. In other districts, it has different names. They call it Eighth Street here.

Downtown.

Can you imagine my successor, Mark Scarborough, lamenting Rapids Mall and ShopKo Plaza Mall as plaintively as I have Woolworth's and Johnson Hills for 15 percent of a century?

Think some kid'll be crying in his Pepsi when they tear down the old video store? Or Hardee's? Oh yeah, some kid probably will. So it goes.

Epitomizing the old downtown in the early 1990s, the bankrupt Wisconsin Theatre waited in dull gloom to rejoin former citizens of the fabled thoroughfare: the Wards Block, The River Block, the old Grand Avenue bridge, etc. etc.

The once-happy home to celluloid fantasy, where little boys and big ones watched their heroes smack the bad guys around and stared even more intently and in vain as garments shredded from Sophia Loren ... this Wisconsin palace saw its showroom, in its decline, chopped into small screens, and attached to a drab outlet of pornography in which the heroes were negligible and the women were, without suspense or remorse, naked.

The conglomerated structure, perhaps architecturally ill-conceived but once glamorous, had fallen to the wrong "hands": those of Mother Nature and her consort, Mutability.

We have been told of the ravages: the flooded cry room, the fungus-among-us carpeting, the bat-infested, haunted caverns in which walled-in victims banged until their moans melded with the wind.

A fortune was spent on rent for "Watch out for avalanche" signs as chunks of the towers, officials said, careened to the sidewalk, endangering little old ladies canvassing craft stores for tempura paint. Or had the Hunchback of Notre Dame left his steeple to push off gargoyles?

If knocking down an assemblage of blocks and mortar is "doom," the Wisconsin was cursed a long time ago, when "redevelopment" reared its ugly head. Choices were made in the Sixties and Seventies about what kind of a place this was to be.

As forty middle-aged and elderly buildings were demolished in 1978 for Rapids Mall, it became clear that this was gonna be a mall kinda spot, a kind of non-place committed to pursuit of a new breed of shoppers as busy as bugs, most of whom couldn't give a dang less about the old downtown and, if the truth were known, were probably already endeared to the environment in which they were nurtured: blazingly bright, night-lit, asphalt flats.

This is not to say our downtown was notably splendid in its latter days. Looking at the little pictures that are available, some of the stores that charmed us were patched up old relics.

Looking at the big picture, it was kind of a mess, especially as it disintegrated. The river itself, only recently bathed in a benign glow by tourism officials, was virtually ignored as establishments kept their backs turned to its then distinctly aromatic liqueur.

But so what? It was our downtown and we loved it.

When I was a kid, downtown was downtown. It seemed like a place of substance, a place with a history, a place to go to and a place to be from, a place of big, mysterious buildings and a place of people who knew they had a place.

Most downtowns were like that then, with their dime stores and bus stations, dress shops, grocery stores and taverns, gas stations, department stores, J.C. Penney's, Montgomery Wards, one good hotel among lessers, restaurants, drug stores, soda fountains, pool halls, mysterious rows of windows upstairs.

Usually, the big multi-storied high school wasn't far away.

And, if you grew up there, or lived in that town for a while, bits of your life came to be harbored in the bricks and blocks, the sidewalks, the storefronts, the alleys and streets, the views.

Wouldn't it be a trip to take the kids and grandkids downtown and show them the sites?

Beginning next time, we'll try. We'll revisit the 1950s and walk a few blocks in our own footsteps.

By the way, it's 10 a.m. on a Sunday morning. Do you know where you are?

No doubt you're outside some generic discount store on a generic strip.

You're in the vicinity of a multitude of generic fast food joints, under a humongous sign that blazes its name: Grand Generic Mall.

You're in the generic parking lot, searching for one thing that's truly unique but extremely difficult to find in these generic times: your generic car.

WEST SIDE STORY 1955

It was dark out past Sand Hill. There were no street lights out past the wrong side of the tracks, out First or Third streets toward Two Mile Avenue, where the future city historian lived. But any afternoon (except Sunday) or any Friday night, downtown was a bright, busy place and the center of attraction.

In order to recreate a sense of those days, take a look here at some of the names on storefronts and windows. All are contained in a 1955 city directory.

For those who lived a good part of their lives downtown, many of these names are stories in themselves.

To me and others to whom I spoke, there was not always an east side and west side. In our words, there was "this side" and "the other side" of the bridge or river.

Since the "other" or west side has received most attention lately, let's start there.

In 1955, Grand Avenue West was the newest and most exciting Place-2-Be. The venerable Mead-Witter and River Block buildings were actually only about 30 years old, equivalent to a building existing now (1999) that had been built in 1969.

Ward's Block

Heading west: Just across the Grand Avenue bridge to the left, or south (downstream), was an old building once known as the Nash Block, with a new store: Montgomery Ward.

Also in the building, according to the directory: IGA Foodliner, Jerrold's Clothing Store, Radio Station WFHR and Nash Hardware Co.

Upstairs were Household Finance Corp., Mi-Lady's Beauty Salon, J.M. Potter, district attorney, and George Frechette's Wisconsin Network, Inc.

Wisconsin Theatre Block

In the next block were the Empire Bar, Aton's Boys Shop/Hutchison Draperies, Art's Restaurant, the Mecca Tavern, Kerrin's Candy Shop and the Wisconsin Theatre, District 4, State of Wisconsin Highway Commission, upstairs.

Also: Johnson Jewelry, Quick Lunch restaurant, Badger Paint Store, Bill's Billiard's, Consumers Market and Church's Prescription Drug Store.

Upstairs were city attorney J. Jeffrey; Dr. E.J. Clark, dentist; J.J. Jeffrey, attorney; E.C. Nehls, dentist; Dr. O. Oakes, dentist; Rapid Collection Service; Stickney Dental Laboratory; and Winn & Murgatroyd real estate, loans and insurance.

Punctuating the end of this walk on the south side of Grand Avenue, across 3rd Avenue South, was the stately First National Bank and more businesses beyond, such as Daly Music and numerous establishments at the Depot bend.

River Block

Starting over from the bridge, heading west again:

On the north, or right side, of Grand Avenue were Heilman's ladies and children's clothing store, Germann's jewelry, Rapids shoe store, Fey [photo] Studio, China & Art Shop, Charles Laramie's Barber Shop and the Western Auto Store.

On the corner was the West Side Branch library.

Mead-Witter Building

In the Mead-Witter block, still heading west, away from the bridge, were:

Harstad's Shoe Store, Klismet's Toyland, Wilpolt's Restaurant, Rapids Bakery, D & M Beauty Shop, Haefner's Barber Shop, Abel's Clothes Shop, Western-Union Telegraph Co., Anderson's Drugs, Newton's Women's Apparel and F.W. Woolworth (the dime store).

Upstairs in the Mead Witter Building were a large number of business offices:

Colburn's Accounting Service; Dr. E. Debus, M.D.; Dr. D.M. Gallagher, Jr., M.D.; Dr. A. Hayward, dentist; Dr. H.C. Hostetter, dentist;

The Mead-Witter Building offices, managed by Estella Farrish; Dr. Siewert, dentist; Dr. T.M. Sullivan, chiropractist; D.H. Teas Insurance; Dr. G. Bennett, dentist; H.A. Becker, CPA.

Also: Brazeau & Brazeau, attorneys; Boles Abstract Co.; W.J. Conway, attorney; Dr. R. Counihan, orthodontist; Cranberry Growers Inc.; L.A. De Guere, architect; General Drivers Union Local 531; Indian Trail Brokerage; Dr. T.W. Jennings, dentist; Metropolitan Life Insurance Co.; Dr. F.J. Radke, chiropractor and Toohey Optical Dispensary.

Across from the First National Bank was Johnson & Hill's, the city's multistoried department store, which would comprise a tour in itself.

Beyond, were the Dixon Hotel, Romanski's Hotel, "the Depot," the Hiawatha, Brown Derby, and a multitude of minor attractions strung out along the Avenue.

THE EAST SIDE 1955

Unlike the West Side, the East Side did not find its focus on Grand Avenue.

The heart of the East Side consisted of First and Second streets, stretching pretty much north and south along the Wisconsin River.

The East Side was significantly older with narrower streets and eccentric blocks that reflected the graceful curve of the Wisconsin river. And it had not been redeveloped in the 1920s as had the West Side.

A sampling from 1955:

Wood Block

It's the last "original" downtown building on the river here, located at the southeast end of the Grand Avenue Bridge at Second Street South.

In 1955, according to a city directory, addresses facing Grand Avenue included, on the ground floor: Wood County Telephone Co., E.J. Schmidt Jewelry and Gift Shop, Lucille Bronson's Towne Shop ladies apparel, and William Schnabel's clothing store.

Upstairs were the Central Wisconsin Real Estate Board; E.C. Glenn, M.D.; Calla Batty, hemstitching; Donn Hougen, architect;

A.J. Midthun, insurance; Millard and Raabe, optometrist; Siewert Real Estate and Insurance; Leo Spaeth, dentist; and Ella La Vigne's Wood County Abstract Co.

Second Street, South of Grand

On the east, the Hole tavern. On the west, or river bank, the Elks Club (at park's edge) and then Rollie's Bar, the latter in the "basement" of the Wood Block.

Rapids Theatre Block

In 1999, home to Rogers Cinema and Schmidt Law Office, this block in 1955 held Ronnie's Mobilgas Service Station, the Rapids Theatre, the Friendly Fountain, Perry's Sport Shop, Reiland and Schmidt Law Office.

Second Street, North of Grand On the Right (East) Side

Across Grand Avenue on the northeast corner was the Wood County National Bank, in a building also housing Crowns Crowns and Crowns, attorneys; the F.F. Mengel Co.; Rapids Adjustment Co.; and the Wisconsin Rapids Credit Bureau.

Moving upstream: Schroeder's Variety Store; Hamm's Barber Shop; Finer Foods Market; Coast to Coast; and Brauer's clothing store.

In some cities, the Brauer's building, originally the 1880s Gardner Block, would have been considered a treasure. Still in excellent condition, the century-old structure was dismantled before my eyes in the early 1980s.

Daly Block

Second Street, Left (West) Side

The "Daly Block" pulsed with activity in 1955. It's now a park.

Along the river bank, beginning at the Grand Avenue Bridge, were Gleue's Shoe Store and the Sugar Bowl Restaurant.

Above were A.F. Billmeyer and Son [Carl], architects; Norbert M. Daly Insurance Agency; Flynn and Crowns, attorneys; Bernard H. Goggins, attorney; and Ann Schultz's Beauty Shop.

Moving north along the river (which was just a bag toss out the back steps) were Neise's Shoe Store; Gamble hardware store; J.C. Penney Co.; H.D. Billmeyer, attorney; and John E. Daly Drug & Jewelry.

Ellen Jacobson's Monogram Shop and apartments occupied the second floor.

First Street, North of Oak

Across Oak Street on First Street North, in the 100 block and including the "flatiron" building, were Wisconsin Rapids Building and Loan Association; Dr. W.G. Dahlke, dentist; W.T. Nobles, attorney; Dr. F.X. Pomainville, M.D.; Spot Hat Cleaners; Badger Bar; Mirman's Furniture; and Jones Paint Store.

The 200 block included Klun's Studio; Staub's Electric Co.; and the Central Labor Temple Association, with a bar and bowling alley.

(The Jackson Street bridge was opened about this time.)

Second Street North

North of Oak Street, the 100 block of Second Street North began with Your Record Shop; the Davis Restaurant (upstairs: Barnitz Beauty Salon; Robert P. Bender, attorney; Burbey Insurance Agency; Vaughn Abstracter and Public Stenographer); Buckley Baldwin Veterans of Foreign Wars Post 2534; Wisconsin Rapids Furniture Co.; Schill Motor Service Inc.; Jeff's Bar; Wisconsin Auto Supply Co.; Frank Gill Co.; and Warsinske Motor Co.

JACKSON STREET BRIDGE

Still the new bridge to old guys

When I was a kid...

There were two bridges in Wisconsin Rapids: the Grand Avenue Bridge and the New Bridge. After the Riverview Expressway was built, the New Bridge wasn't new any more and had to be renamed the Jackson Street Bridge.

Reconditioned with a similar span that hasn't changed its fundamental identity, the nearly 40-year-old chunk of infrastructure has fulfilled mainly a utilitarian purpose, though some of the best views of spring floods can be had from its north railing.

Paul Gross, the popular Oak Street jeweler, was employed in the same capacity at Daly Drug during construction of the Jackson Street Bridge. Going upstairs in the Daly building one day, he looked out the window.

"Am I seeing things?" he wondered.

First smoke, then flames began to shoot out from the construction spanning the river.

Gross called the fire department. Though the city's only fire station was directly across the street from the east end of the bridge, engines had to go all the way across the Grand Avenue Bridge to reach the fire from the west, Gross said.

According to the August 19, 1955, *Daily Tribune*, the fire occurred December 3, 1954, in the framework

constructed in the middle of the river where footings were being poured.

Though the \$378,000 bridge, begun July 27, 1954, was completed in August 1955, ahead of schedule, by L.G. Arnold Inc., Eau Claire, the fire was one of several bridge-building mishaps.

By August 1954, work had begun on a cofferdam to provide room for excavating rock from the river bottom and to provide protection in curing the concrete. The first pier was constructed from the east end.

A temporary wooden bridge was extended across the river from the west bank. As each pier was completed, the temporary trestle would be pulled back and work started on the next pier.

Work went on happily until the middle of October when heavy rains began swelling the Wisconsin River. As the bridge project was threatened, the crew attempted to strengthen the temporary wooden bridge by covering it with sandbags and three feet of dirt.

E.E. Belter, power superintendent for Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co. said that five gates on Consolidated's dam would have to be opened because all upriver reservoirs were filled.

"If the Mead Reservoir were in existence now a big part of this flood wouldn't be coming down," Belter surmised at the time, referring to an unsuccessful project that is now the Mead wildlife refuge.

During the flood, the "snarling" waters smashed the wooden trestle to pieces, many of which washed down river into Lake Petenwell at a loss of \$10,000 to the contractor.

Efforts continued, to locate and retrieve sections of the bridge which had lodged at various points downstream. One piece was recovered from its position just above Belle Island.

By November 10, a new temporary trestle had been constructed. Work on remaining piers continued throughout the winter. After piers were poured, they were steam-heated to cure the concrete. As piers were connected with beams, a crane boom suddenly collapsed, dropping the 91-foot girder into the Wisconsin River.

After a short delay, the girder was recovered.

Pouring of the concrete roadway, completion of sidewalks and installation of railings began in spring and the bridge was opened to traffic July 29, 1955.

Only one building had been affected by the project: Bushnell's Service Station, 238 First Street North, which stood in the way of a new street entering the bridge and was removed.

The first official action of the Common Council initiating the bridge had been the July 5, 1950, authorization of a \$2,500 origin-destination traffic study conducted by the State Highway Commission. The report was published in 1952.

The survey stated that a small city such as Wisconsin Rapids would normally have no problem with its volume of traffic. However, with only one vehicular bridge within the city limits, the traffic congestion had become acute.

The problem had been brought about by a unique feature of the city:

"Instead of having one centrally located business section, it has two, one on each side of the river. Immediately adjacent to the west-side section is the city's major industry which employs hundreds of workers. With each of these riverside areas generating substantial volumes of traffic, the movement across the river is large, especially during the peak hours when the paper mill's workshifts are changing.

"Traffic on the bridge is further increased by east side residents who do much of their shopping and business on the west side of the river."

Bridge scholars also considered the possibility of a serious emergency during peak hours when fire equipment from the single station on the east side could be seriously delayed.

Disagreement as to whether to locate the new bridge upstream or downstream from the existing Grand Avenue Bridge was resolved by placing it near to the main source of traffic: the Consolidated mill.

PARKS

Scenic River City is result of beautification project

The beauty of Wisconsin Rapids didn't get there by accident.

Records at the parks and recreation office begin in 1907, three years after the first sheet spun out of Consolidated's new mill and Rapids had settled into its role as a paper city. It was a good time for the city mothers and fathers to construct a green future.

Governing their plan was a principle that new riverbank parks should replace old buildings.

Appointed by Mayor Joseph Cohen, the first Board of Park Commissioners was composed of F. MacKinnon, Mrs. W.J. Conway, Mrs. Stella Paulus, N. Reiland and E. Roenius. Other names associated with the early Commissioners were Arpin, Kellogg, Ellis, Hill, Pease and Hansen, the last immortalized by the lower west bank's "Ben Hanson" Park.

Probably the most important participants in park planning were Charlotte and Isaac Witter, and George and Ruth (Isaac's sister) Mead of Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., who seem to have initiated the plan and carried it forward with personal and corporate exertions.

After 1920, Henry C. Demitz served as longtime secretary of the park board. His labors, like those of Hansen, were later acknowledged by a park in his name.

In August 1907, the park board recommended to the Common Council the purchase of riverbank property south of the "Wood buildings" (still standing) on the east side and other land on the west side, south of the "Lyons" property.

The stated object was "the cleansing and beautifying of such property for enjoyment of the entire city."

Islands in the Wisconsin River, downstream from the Northwestern railroad bridge (replaced by Riverview Expressway), also were considered prospective park land.

In a similar proposition, made in 1920, attorney and historian T.W. Brazeau moved to obtain riverbank land "opposite" (across First Avenue) the Mrs. T.E. Nash home (now Northland Cranberries, Inc.) and other land within city limits "in order the river bank be kept free from unsightly buildings."

On September 12, 1923, George Mead reported he had succeeded in getting the Dr. Looze property on the east bank, extending south of the H.C. Demitz home to the Northwestern tracks.

A 1929 purchase, that of 150 American elm trees to be planted on city land, would have repercussions in mid-century when the variety, by then composing a nationwide urban monoculture, was decimated by Dutch elm disease.

Notes made by Demitz show that the ubiquitous city planning consultant, Phelps Wyman, did not like the mixing of varieties and recommended further that small pine trees in Tourist Park be removed, leaving only the large elm trees he favored.

Tourist Park, a campground, was located on the west bank of the Wisconsin, between the Northwestern railroad bridge and Boles Creek.

Other city parks listed in a 1933 survey:

East Side River Bank (south from the Elks Club), Riverview, Robinson, the "old cemetery," Gaynor;

Edwards, Garrison and Witter islands;

East Grand Avenue, (likely referring to the future site of McMillan Memorial Library), and Lincoln Field (now Witter Field, named for Isaac Witter).

Much discussion centered on the swimming pool at the present east side location.

When the "War Mothers" wanted, in 1937, to plant memorial trees by the new stone wall south of the Consolidated dam, once again, it was proposed that elm be used as extensively as possible.

A sewage disposal plant was proposed for the river bank south of Tourist Park, but the park board disapproved, stating, "The city of Wisconsin Rapids has for years been unique because of the beauty of its riverbank park system, and ... this riverbank park system has come into being only after years of effort and expenditure of considerable money and time."

A major cycle of park creation and one that coincided with an overall beautification project came in 1944 and 1945 with removal of commercial buildings on the east side river bank in the vicinity of the present Jackson Street bridge.

Consolidated, this time in the person of George Mead's son, Stanton W. Mead, informed the park board, at a December 1944 meeting, of Consolidated plans "for riverbank properties from the Don Daly property at 1st and Oak north to the Eugene Miller property.

"The company hopes to eventually acquire all of the riverbank properties in that area and to park such areas as are to be used for other purposes," said Mead.

Included was real estate formerly belonging to the Odd Fellows, Miller, Sutor, Hirzy, J.A. Staub, J.M. Herschleb, Kathleen E. Geoghan, Bittner, E.T. Bodette and Joseph Klun.

It should surprise no one here to know that authorities were devoted to returning the oldest neighborhoods of the Rapids to a manicured state rather than to perpetuating the dilapidated fabrications of previous administrations.

Suckow: LAND BANK

William F. Suckow served 32 years with the Federal Land Bank here and 23 years as a Wisconsin Rapids alderman.

His reminiscence:

When my father came home, he said, "The war is on."

I was scared to death. I thought the war was next door.

He had been to Wausau, where some people trooped down the main street, carrying an effigy of the Kaiser. Every once in a while, somebody'd hit him with a club or something like that. The feeling was very strong at that time, World War I.

We had the ethnics there in the Athens area: the Germans, some Polish, a few Switzers and the English mixed in, too.

We were treated good, though. They couldn't be very rough to us Germans because we were the majority group.

I was born in Athens, at that time a typical Wisconsin lumbering town with wood sidewalks.

My dad's folks came over from Germany and bought a 40-acre farm in the town of Bern. When I was five or six years old, we moved to that farm.

My grandpa talked German all the time and, when he got angry at us, he swore German, so we never knew what he said.

My mother's folks, by the name of Winger, were Switzers. They settled on a 40-acre farm nearby.

My dad made a living by drilling wells. When he moved out of town, he bought one cow. The guy that sold it to us gave us the poorest cow, I guess, but we built up a good dairy farm anyway.

Oh yes, I was a farmer. A lot of times, I had manure up to my knees.

I went to a little country school kitty-corner across the road from the farm and, later, to high school in Athens. I thought I'd like to be a fella that works with wood but not just to build houses. I wanted to make cabinets.

It's a heck of a thing to say, but there were no jobs when I graduated from high school in 1928. So I decided to be a teacher.

After a year at Wausau teacher college, I taught at the Ladd school near Athens. It was a new brick school with one classroom. It wasn't a little white school that was 300 years old.

The first day, I was more scared than the kids. But you had your subjects, and you had your classes, and that was kind of laid out for you at the county seat. My wife-to-be was teaching nearby, where I'd go by her school on the way home from mine.

Her name was Mary Ann Raese. One day, I stopped in and introduced myself.

We were married June 5, 1933.

After that, I walked three miles out from our home in Athens every day to teach at a second country school. I taught there eight years while attending Stevens Point Normal part time to complete my teacher's training.

In 1941, I had a contract to teach at a two-room school at Rothschild. When I arrived there, however, I got in the Wausau Paper mill. They let me out of my teaching contract even though it was only a week before school started.

Teachers didn't get paid anything. You're lucky if you got \$100 for the year. In the mill, they paid 32 cents an hour and overtime.

In 1942, I came to Rapids to work for the Federal Land Bank and was here ever since. The war was on then, and I had to go down to Milwaukee for a physical.

When I went back the next morning, he said, "We've reviewed your case. You're excused. You can go home."

They didn't give me any reason, but I was getting along in years. I had two or three children, and I was classified "agriculture" because I worked for the Federal Land Bank, loaning money to farmers.

When I came here, they had over 100 farms for sale that had loans from the Federal Land Bank system and had gone belly up during the last depression.

I sold some farms and rented some farms. They were generally run down, but they were awful good bargains. At that time, nobody would pay anything for them.

Towards the last, I was making big loans. I was the only guy they allowed to make cranberry loans. I made a \$220,000 loan to one large family marsh.

My first interest in politics was in Athens. I had run for assessor and lost. In 1951, someone here said, "Why don't you run for alderman?" And I did.

You didn't have any big issue. You just said, "Oh, my goodness, they're spending too much in the city hall. Throw 'em out."

I was on the city council for 23 years. They got tired of throwing me out, and I retired in 1974.

Nels Justeson was mayor back in the Fifties. He was honest and a good worker. He was interested in the city but physically, he had difficulties.

When we'd go to a convention I'd have to help him. He had that bum leg. I stayed with him quite a few meetings until he broke down altogether.

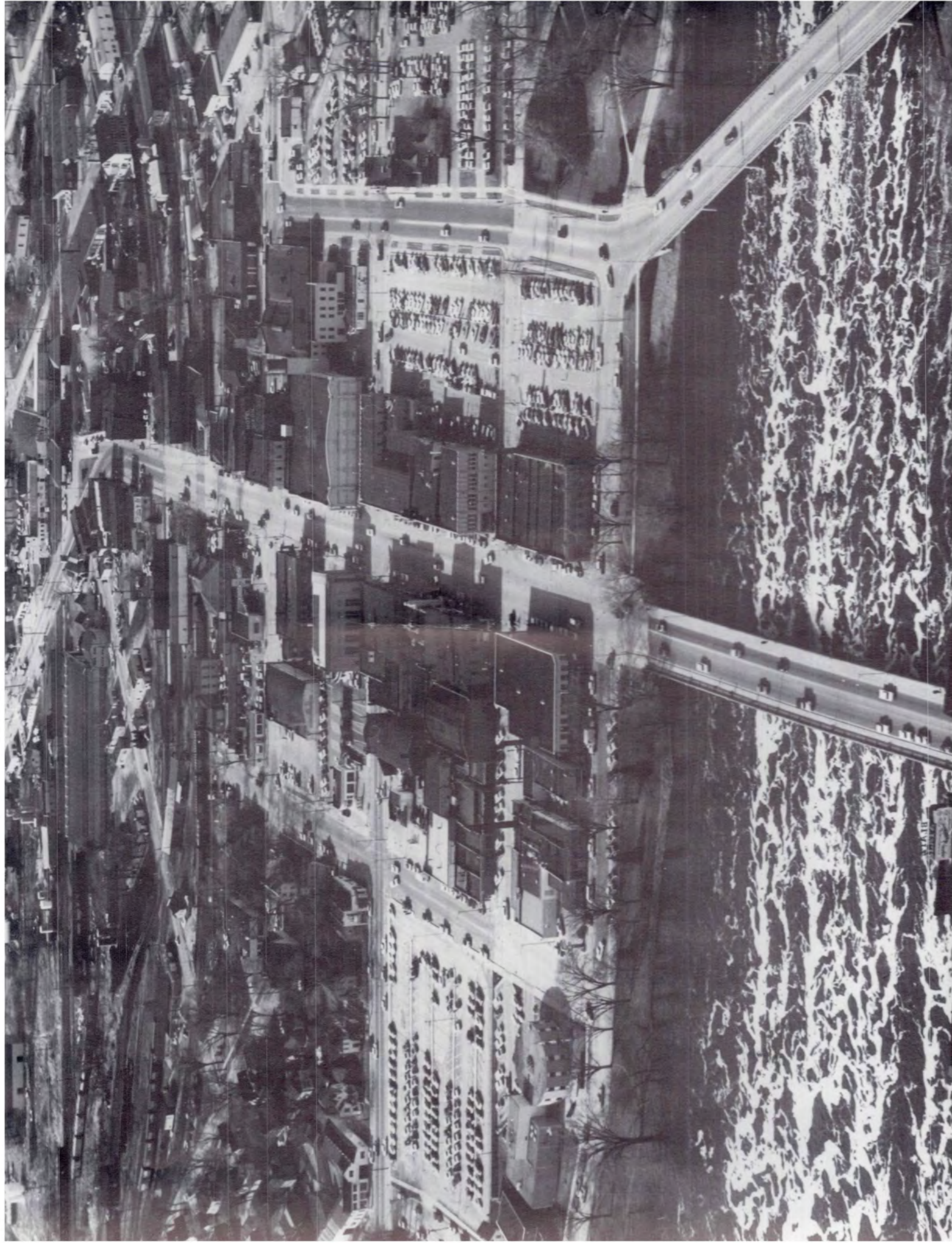
Penza was a workman-like mayor. He did pretty well. I would give him credit for the mall, not so much for the big bridge expressway. That was designed and laid out long before.

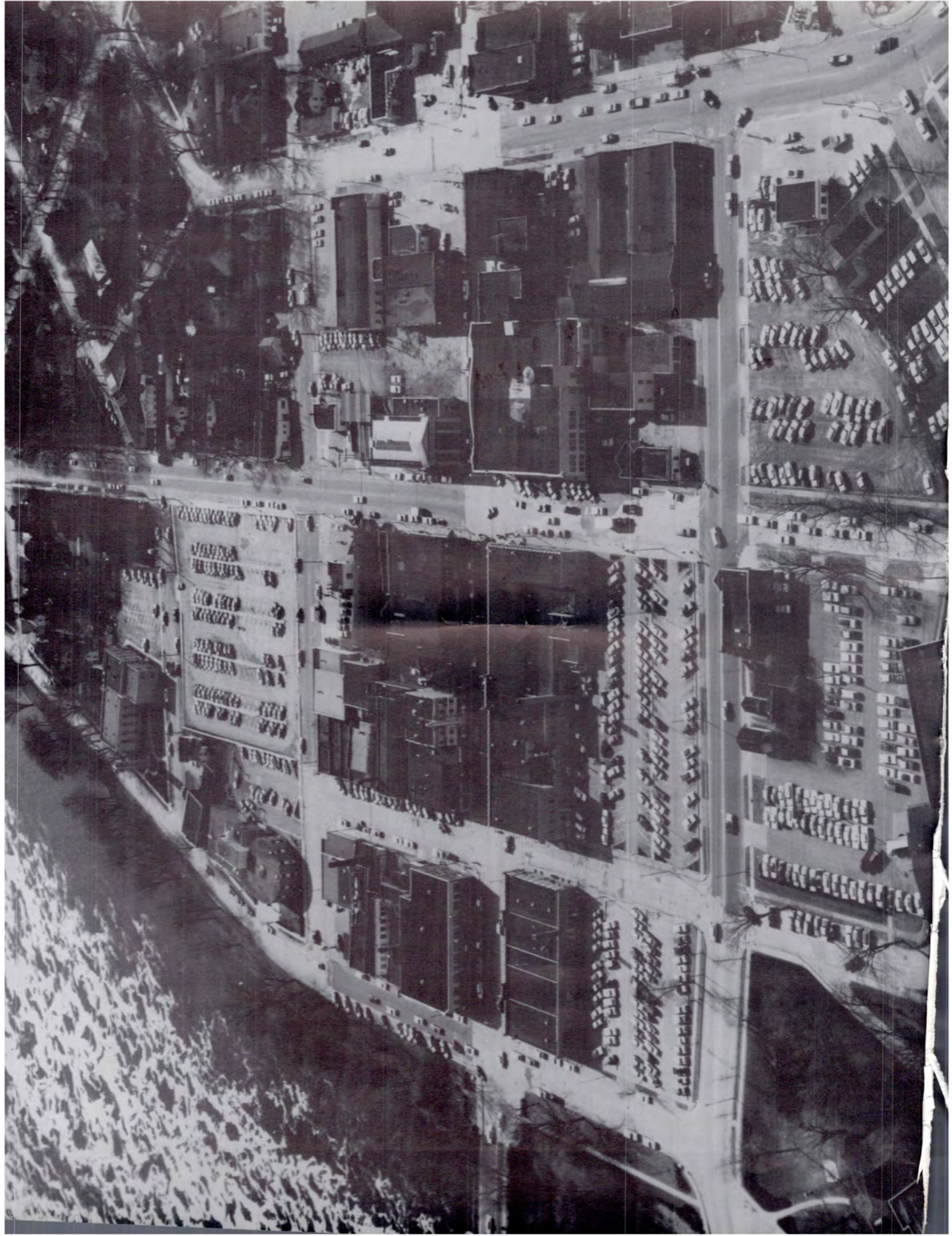
Penza worked too hard and killed himself. I was acting mayor while he was sick.

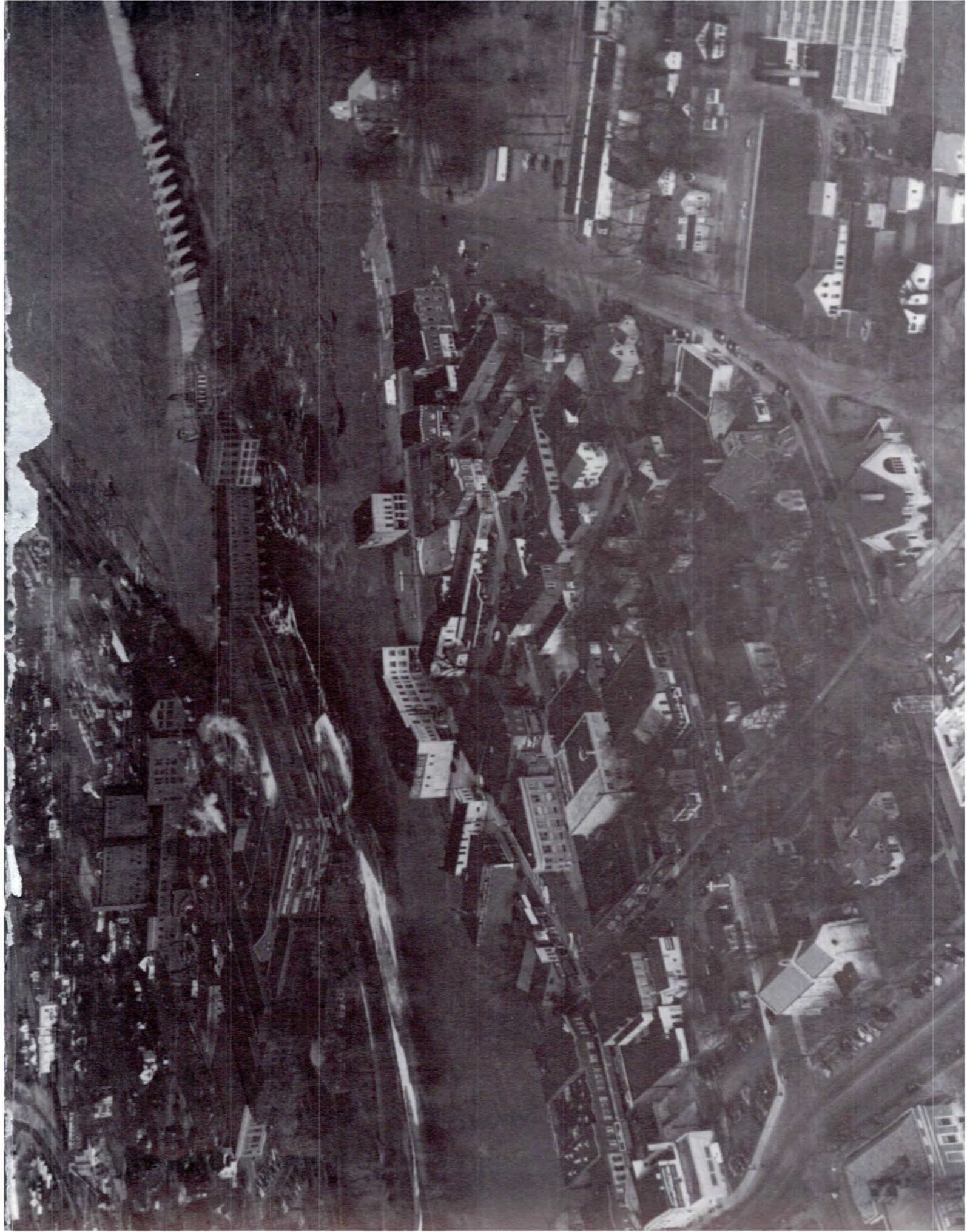
Some of the aldermen I remember, the old gang who ruled the roost, were Clarence Lukaszewski, Bernard Flammang, Harold Sullivan, Dane Dahl and Harold Zager.

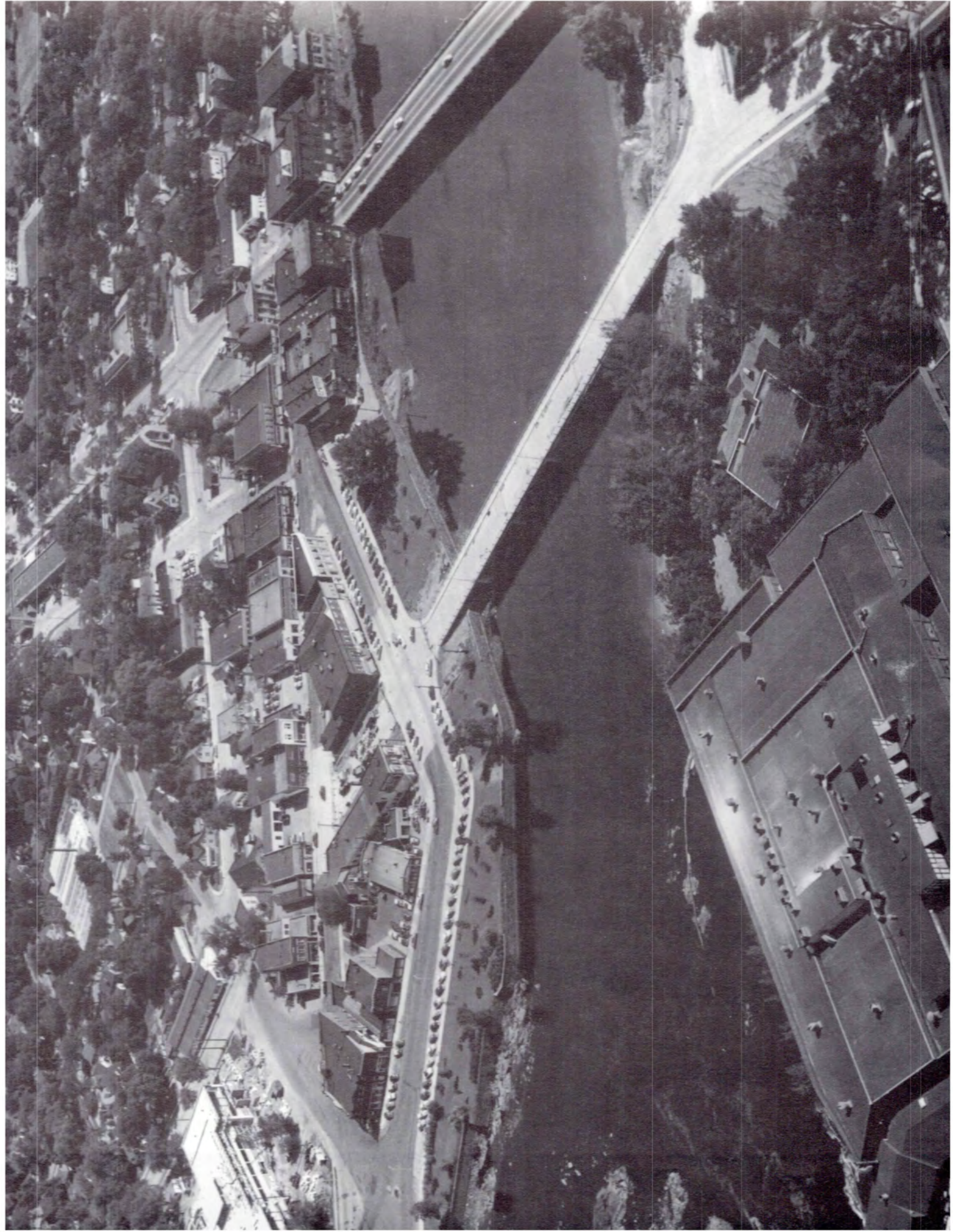
In 1974, a committee walked out on me as chairman. I had been on city council 23 years and was kind of tired of it, so I retired.

Over the years, I ran my head up against the stone wall once in a while. I always voted my own way, regardless. If they got me off the council, I would have lived anyway.









THE BLOB

For a bashful kid from the sticks, being dropped off downtown on a Saturday afternoon was exciting. But to enter a flickering new world of shadow and light was indeed intoxicating.

Of the three theaters then operating, the closest to retirement was the Palace, although we had no sense of that. The Saturday afternoon double features starring Roy Rogers and Dale Evans were eternal, sublime and only 10 cents a ticket.

The building no doubt had seen better days, but it was still exotic. Spanish-style murals were engraved on the walls below a deep, starry sky.

With no fanfare that I, at ten years of age, noticed, the Palace closed up as a theater. Its last *Tribune* ad seems to have been December 10, 1955.

Longer-lived than "the Palace" was "the Rapids." In the west portion of the present Rogers Cinema, the Rapids was poised for the Friday night question, "Going to the show?"

In 1958-59, eighth-graders, from our Grove School, from SS. Peter & Paul, from Mead, from almighty Howe and from other schools, answered, "Yup."

The boys donned feathered, felt hats from Penney's and asked their parents to be dropped off discreetly at the corner of Grand and Third Street.

In the cramped vestibule of the Rapids, the seemingly ancient Greek who owned the theater "took" the tickets and tore them in half. "Hi, Tom," he said.

"Hi, Tom," he said again as the line passed by.

"Hi, Tom," some answered the figure who called everyone else "Tom," though that was his own name.

Many will remember going to the small candy counter next, for Milk

Duds, Dots, Holloway bars, jujubes, nickel popcorn or dime Cokes.

Inside, bold boys "sat with" girls—equivalent to meeting in a bar five years later. The same wild ones mimicked Marlon Brando by smoking in the decrepit little men's room at the back.

The first "horror show" several of us were allowed to see was *The Blob*. It was one of Steve McQueen's first roles and it was really scary.

The Rapids was a house for shows but no show house. In the period initiating the decline of theaters, it already was seedy. As flying popcorn boxes cast their shadows on the screen, rips and stains were all too apparent. And you did not want to touch the underside of your slightly unstable seat unless you needed to place another wad of used gum there.

Another theater was the best of the three. Located in the heart of West Grand Avenue, the Wisconsin offered luxury, partly because it had so much extra space. There was the long walk from the ticket booth to the snack bar, lined with posters of coming attractions. Then there was more lobby area leading to the doors of the theater itself.

Upstairs were a commodious, mirrored, lounge, graciously appointed rest rooms and, most distinctive, a "cry room."

The purported purpose of the lachrymatorium was to provide a soundproof padded cell for tykes. But more often, it served teen-agers in their quest for privacy.

The Wisconsin was a good place to go on Saturday night with a date when you were in high school or college. Two "students" could get in for a buck.

For having sold Sunday *Milwaukee Journal* subscriptions, this author was awarded a free ticket to the Wisconsin, along with Two Mile Avenue "alley gang" buddy, Bruce Zanow. The ticket could not be used on a weekend.

What happened to be showing was *The Defiant Ones*, in which Sydney Poitier, a "Negro," and Tony Curtis, white trash, escape from a prison work gang, chained together. It was the first "message film" either had seen.

Had it not been for the two plucky news boys, the row after row of seats in

the mammoth cave of a room would have been vacant. The mysterious machinery cranked to life and the dramatic struggle on the big screen was shown just for them.

After the movie was over, two young white boys, bound not by chains but by a childhood in common, walked out of the Second Avenue exit of the Wisconsin. At 9 o'clock on a Monday night, they stood alone on the desolate streets of downtown Rapids, their hometown.

The older of the two pulled his jacket together at the neck and said, perhaps with a hint of surprise at his own reaction, "That was pretty good."

A sulfurous chill came off the river and ruffled crewcuts slightly.

Said the younger, "Yeah, it really made you think."

Chevy Chase

Once upon a time, a funny thing happened after the show.

On a Wednesday evening in April 1952, the author's mother, Sally Engel, had taken him and his sister, Kathy, to "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" at the Wisconsin Theatre, along with longtime neighbors Ruby Caves, and her daughter, Linda.

When the show was over, the group got in the car and, no doubt still lost in Disney fantasies, drove east, across the Grand Avenue bridge.

Mrs. Gilbert Gouchee also attended *Snow White*. But when she came out, she couldn't find her car anywhere and reported it stolen to police sergeant William Sanger.

Meantime, the Engel vehicle stopped for the traffic lights at Second Street and Grand Avenue, near the other theater, the Rapids.

Mrs. Engel, feeling a slight bump, looked around at something she hadn't planned on seeing: the driverless car she had just towed from the Wisconsin. Her trailer hitch had caught on the Gouchee front bumper.

She notified officer Carl Sharkey, and the adults pushed the "stolen" auto into a nearby gas station.

It would have made a good Chevy Chase movie, though a short one.

THE MEAD

Richard Nixon slept here.

So did John and Robert Kennedy.

Not to mention Jacqueline and Ethel Kennedy, Glen Campbell, Gene Autry, Guy Lombardo, Duke Ellington, Tammy Wynette, Autsy Stewart, Warren Knowles, Estes Kefauver and a host of musicians, politicians, businessmen, paper wonks, travelers and just plain relatives.

At the Mead.

It became an established community institution, despite the best intentions of the builder and owner, then-named Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co.

President George W. Mead I insisted he did not want to go into the hotel business; nor was the growing paper company interested in financing construction.

No way.

Absolutely not.

Yet, what kind of city didn't have a fine hotel?

In 1948, Mead told the Wisconsin Rapids Chamber of Commerce about 40-year-old plans for beautification and modernization of the east-side business district. Already, acres of unsightly riverfront property had been "parked."

"Wisconsin Rapids is not truly a hospitable city because we cannot properly accommodate our visitors," Mead asserted. The only hotels at that time were the Dixon and the Witter; neither was as safe nor modern as some of Consolidated's clients had come to expect.

Travelers and tourists would make Wisconsin Rapids their center and stopping place if they had a fine and commodious hotel, Mead believed. How about someone else coming forward and building one?

Mead pointed out that the Witter Hotel was scheduled for demolition to provide downtown parking, and that Consolidated had acquired property east

of 4th Street, between Oak Street and Grand Avenue—a fine location for the Witter's replacement.

Consolidated attempted to interest a hotel chain in building a Wisconsin Rapids component, or so wrote long-time Mead manager Edward P. Kurtz in 1962. "When this proved unsuccessful, the company considered a guest house as an alternative."

Soon, the inevitable conclusion was reached, said Kurtz, "that the community needed a facility, [and] it was decided a public unit would be constructed to accommodate both the company and the community needs."

Contributing to the final plan were the engineering department and some of the top executives of Consolidated, working with local architect Donn Hougen, who provided his typically box-style treatment, "modern in feeling" but "not overdone."

The site chosen was on East Grand Avenue, the "Main Street" of the city, then a main highway, close to but not in the actual downtown business area. This eliminated traffic annoyance, yet made the hotel easily accessible.

When it was found that 85 percent of hotel guests here arrived by auto rather than train, a "unit" was designed that would cater to "automobilized" guests. The new "motelized" hotel is believed to be the first such motor inn in the Midwest.

Hotel comforts were provided, such as dining rooms, cocktail lounge, downstairs lobby, and special party room; but, providing the best of both worlds, as a motel, there were no parking worries, no bell man, no elevator and no tipping problems. The customer received a key, parked by his room and carried his own baggage to quarters.

Constructed of steel, concrete and masonry, the building was considered virtually fireproof. Consolidated's Consoweld plastic-laminate was used whenever possible.

There were 84 rooms, plus the South Pacific Room, which could be converted into two additional units.

New manager Kurtz, former assistant manager of the Hotel Northland, Green

Bay, moved into an apartment at the new hotel with his wife and infant son, Jack.

The prospective original name, "Bel-Mead Hotel," was changed to Hotel Mead in honor of George W. Mead, who had retired in 1950. "The Hotel Mead is a direct result of George Mead's awareness of civic responsibility," related a brochure. "There was the need for better facilities for visitors to Wisconsin Rapids and the desire to restore the beauty of the riverbank. The old hotel, and numerous other buildings of a bygone era, gave way to civic betterment."

On June 25, 1951, the *Daily Tribune* published its own congratulatory open letter to Mead, who was at his winter home in Miami Beach, Fla. The *Tribune* estimated that 9,000 visitors had toured the new facility during an open house.

The hotel opened formally June 30, 1951. In 1954, a one-story banquet room was added. The 1999 name, The Mead Inn, was adopted in 1962.

In 1964, the Mead brought an English theme to the remodeled, enlarged lounge, to be called "The Pub." The dining room was to be called the "Camelot Room."

In late March 1979, the Mead Inn's five-story tower addition opened with 65 guest rooms, a dining room, meeting rooms, large atrium, solar-heated swimming pool and new Pub.

The old Pub had been renamed "The Barley Mow" by Kurtz, after a popular English tavern.

As this book is being assembled, the "old" Mead has been razed and the newest of the new Meads has risen just next door, attached to what was just lately the new Mead. Only a connecting section remains from yesteryear.

Famous people still show up now and then. Recently, I spoke to actress Tyne Daly there and just the other day, I saw Robert Des Jarlais, the locally renowned "Big Kahuna," enjoying a respite from the tackiness of the times, while quaffing some classic liqueur "at the Mead."



1950s Hotel Mead

(Above: SWCHC. Below: CPI.)



Dear Landlord Walrath knew Rapids better than most

If I had not met Theo Walrath more than a decade before his 1992 death, I would be significantly more ignorant than I am. A lot of what I know about Wisconsin Rapids buildings came from his many phone calls and interviews.

Walrath, originally of White Creek, Adams county, grew up in Nekoosa. He moved to Wisconsin Rapids in 1931 for a year at Wood County Teachers College while figuring out what he really wanted to do. A job with Charles F. Kruger's Wood County Grocery Co. led to a career in a professions that might best be termed, "landlord."

Wood Block

Once housing, among other enterprises, the Rapids post office, the two-story section of the Wood Block at the southeast corner of Grand Avenue was built in the 1890s. A three-story section was added on the river side in 1906, Walrath said.

The death of the former owner, Guy Wood of Eau Claire, heir of the building's namesake, brought the Wood Block on the market. Walrath's employer, Charlie Kruger, bought it in 1946 and told Walrath to manage the building, which housed mostly business tenants.

On the ground floor, starting from the bridge, said Walrath, were Al Behrend's barber shop, Rollie's Bar, Schmidt's jewelry, a drug store and Schnabel's men's clothing store on the corner.

The later basement location of Rollie's was vacant in 1946.

The second floor was occupied by three apartments and the offices of

physician Dr. J.J. Looze, optometrist G.W. Millard, dentist Dr. Leo Spaeth, hemstitcher Mrs. Batty, chiropractor B.H. Moyer and insurance and real estate salesman Gilman Coombs.

On the second floor of the three-story portion were architect Donn Hougen, lawyer Herbert Bunde and Wood County abstractor Ella Lavigne. On the third floor was the Knights of Columbus hall.

For a short time, Walrath said, he shared an office with a newcomer to town, attorney Leon Schmidt Sr.

Church's

In 1948, following Kruger's death, Walrath bought out the interests of Kruger's estate by selling Preway stock he had inherited from Kruger and by mortgaging other property.

Among the Kruger estate were west-side properties, including what is now the Church's drug store building. Then, it was known as the Siewert Block.

Walrath said that, in 1945, the owner, Mrs. Otto Siewert, met Kruger on the street. She said, "Mr. Kruger, I've been offered \$36,000 for my block. I'm thinking about accepting it."

Kruger said, according to Walrath, "I don't think that's enough. I'll offer you \$50,000."

Later, Mrs. Siewert called up and said, "Mr. Kruger, were you serious?" He said, "Yes," and the deal was struck.

Church's Drug Store occupied only the corner portion of the Siewert building. Other tenants were Le Ray's dress shop, Consumer's Market and Ignatz Zimmerman's shoe repair.

Upstairs were two apartments, three dentists, a medical doctor, Thorp Finance and John Jeffrey's law office.

Making up a kind of supplementary third floor, no longer existing, was a flat-roofed penthouse not visible from the street.

John Jeffrey's mother told Walrath that she had visited the Siewert building when it was called the Lyons Block and housed the Hotel Lyons. Apparently, the hotel was built in 1879.

The Palace

Also on the west side, Kruger and Walrath had acquired the "Ben Hansen property" adjacent to the Wisconsin

Theater auditorium on Second Avenue South.

The Hansen property continued west through the block and butted up against another theater, the old Palace, which had been closed in the 1950s.

According to Walrath, Frank and Henrietta Eckardt "were people who came to town with money. Mrs. Eckardt bought the Palace after she built the Wisconsin auditorium. They also owned the Rapids Theater."

Walrath said he remembered going to bargain with Mrs. Eckardt in her red brick house, resulting in his purchase of the Palace.

The Palace, "the place to go in the 1920s" and popular as a theater until outshone by the Wisconsin, was in need of renovation by the time of the late 1950s transaction.

Stars could still be seen in the ceiling, and Walrath remembered a revolving unit that made moonbeams move across the sky. There was an organ loft, but the organ had been removed.

Walrath cut the sloping, theater-style hardware floor from the walls and leveled it. He said he filled a five-gallon pail with chewing gum he scraped off the floor.

The first new use for the Palace was as a dance hall. There were wedding receptions, usually catered through Christine Gloden, said Walrath.

At the Palace were some of the first rock 'n' roll shows in town. Among early entertainers were the locally-renowned Zakons and the WSPT disc jockeys of Stevens Point.

In the basement was a lunch counter and pool hall run by Walrath's brother-in-law, Bill Leder. The police officer hired to keep order, Walrath said, usually was Charlie Kirschner, who could be found at the Quick Lunch when needed.

After a while, Walrath "got disgusted" with the dance-hall business and shut it down. He later rented the building to a church.

In view of recent developments, Walrath told me, "Thank God I don't own any downtown properties in Wisconsin Rapids any more."

Odd FELLOWS

As the boy waited for the Christmas party, he became absorbed in the heroic figures on the wall.

The time-worn oil painting displayed a familiar, kindly man who wore a beard and a funny hat. Befriending the needy had made him world-famous, though no one knew his real name.

No, this was not the jelly-filled arctic elf of "The Night Before Christmas" but the anonymous "Good Samaritan" of Luke 10: 30-36. In the work of art, the Samaritan knelt on what could only be a foreign road, cradling crime's victim in his arms.

A small silver plaque said the painting had been presented to Grand Rapids Lodge No. 91 of the Odd Fellows on August 21, 1894.

At bottom right was scrawled on the canvas, apparently by the artist, "L.A. Bushnell, Omro, Wisconsin."

It made sense that the painting was in the Wisconsin Rapids Odd Fellows hall at 550 Third Street South.

Odd? The good Samaritan was odd for sure, stopping to help while "normal" people passed by. Further, the stated civic purposes of the Odd Fellows are to visit the sick, relieve the distressed, bury the dead and educate the orphan.

A much smaller frame hung nearby, containing the 1873 charter of Lodge No. 91, signed during the heyday of Odd-Fellowship by Oscar Taylor, C.L. Powers, F.W. Burt, Seth Reeves, L. Kromer and J.S. Cotey. Dignitaries all, were they Samaritans?

When the boy tagged along to the old lodge with his father, he knew nothing about these pioneers. But he knew the names of a few of the Odd Fellows of the early 1950s. Good fellows and odd:

Bill Worlund, Frank Newman, Clarence Riemer, Delbert Riemer, Herb Sering, Les Hill, Oscar Lynn, Ernest Kronholm.

They met every Tuesday night in a fine old two-story building, in the midst of elm-lined Third Street, "Quality Row," where the wealth had assembled their households at some previous time, one that he knew nothing about.

Inside the front doors of the Odd Fellows lodge hall, the right half of the ground floor was taken up by a mysterious, urban-style apartment, always behind closed doors, whose tenants were never seen, or, if they were, are unremembered.

To the left of the front entrance was the club room, a fine hangout for young and old alike with a pocket billiard and numerous sheephead tables at the ready. Along one wall was a small library of very old books that hearkened back to some previous fraternal home. The entire atmosphere was pervaded by a refreshing, stale odor, in part made up of old cigar smoke.

From the large foyer, a stairway reached high up to another world.

Deep rituals obviously took place there in the grand, hardwood-floored ballroom where ornate wooden chairs were reserved for the Noble Grands and grand dames of the sisterhood, Riverside Rebekah Lodge 12. That boys were not allowed to witness what went on in their councils only added to a sense of sorcery.

After the 1952 meeting at which the boy's father, Donald Engel, was elected "noble grand," according to a *Daily Tribune* clipping, "Plans were also made for the children's Christmas party."

For that Yuletide and others, the township boy joined a bunch of city kids for games, entertainment and black-and-white movies. The brittle 35mm film was apt to break at any time, followed by a familiar "flick flick flick" as the reel continued to spin until the hapless projectionist stopped the reel and looked for some tape.

Finally, the sainted Claus arrived with a robust rush of cold air and his standard, "Ho Ho Ho. Have we any good little girls and boys here?"

His benevolence occupied an ornate high-backed lodge chair, handing out paper bags in which more eager than good children found hard candy, a popcorn ball and an orange—items already old-fashioned but still valued by children of those days.

A 1962 photo shows Santa handing a gift-wrapped box to the author's little brother, Ken.

Though Ken seems entirely happy with the situation, Santa looks odd enough for any lodge. His beard is too thin, obviously fake. His stuffing, too high on the breast, is just plain obvious.

Behind him stands an impressively decorated pine tree and the obligatory movie screen.

Sliced in half vertically by the photographer is the youthful figure of the dad—younger than I am now, and better looking.

To the boy in the story, the Odd Fellows lodge hall had been on Third Street forever.

On the contrary. Lodge 91, with 1850s origins, had, after its 1873 charter, been housed in numerous and sundry quarters elsewhere: the Pomainville building; the Gardner block; their own digs after 1911; the Reiland building in 1928; and, in 1932, the *Wood County Reporter* building.

In 1947, Lodge 91 purchased the L.E. Nash house on 3rd Street South.

The remodeled Nash house was dedicated in 1949. The Odd Fellows had just moved in about the time the boy first entered the door.

The hall was downstream of another old building, the "new" Rapids library in the former I.P. Witter house. Aptly enough, the Odd Fellows had instituted the community's first public library in 1875 (and the first city band about 1879).

The Third Street building was sold in 1980 and a new lodge hall built at 1930 Seventh Street South.

With few youngsters available in changing times, there is no longer a Christmas party scheduled. However, a child in search of the right spirit will still find in the lodge the big picture of the Samaritan doing his best to save a fellow man.

JOE CHATTERBOX

Pro-ball
player hosted
popular
west side
hangout

Until lately, you could still see a few signs of the old Chatter Box restaurant that stood at 1111 West Grand Avenue: a concrete slab, a metal railing, a depression in the grass. The building has been gone quite a few years now and West Grand Avenue is gradually attaining the hectic urban strip characteristics of 8th Street.

The former owner of the Chatterbox was Joe Nuhlicek, the father of my friend for all seasons, Jim.

Joe was born August 25, 1900, at Milladore, but spent his "formative years" in Marshfield. He quit school in the 5th grade and got a job in an ice cream factory, beginning a working life that, for many years, was to involve food and sports.

By the time he was 14, Joe was playing baseball with the Marshfield city team. At \$7 a game, he was earning as much as some people made in a week, he said.

Though he never made a play for the big leagues, Joe said he was considered one of the best center-fielders in Wisconsin semi-pro baseball.

Besides working the Central Wisconsin League, he played on teams in La Porte, Indiana, and Superior.

Joe said that, in exhibition games, he faced the blacklisted Chicago Black Sox three times and, "as far as I was concerned, they didn't look any better than I was."

He acquired the nickname "Nuhly" (pronounced "Newly") when a Superior sportswriter said Nuhlicek was too hard to spell. In Superior, Joe supplemented

his income by operating the ballpark's hamburger stand.

Besides baseball, Joe played basketball, for the Marshfield National Guard team. "When we went down to Rapids with Company C, we'd take the military band along," he said. "They'd run a special train down with the Northwestern."

The accommodations, however, were not so good once Joe and his teammates arrived to play Aaron Ritchay, Art Plahmer and the rest of this city's team.

The armory, where the games were played, had no dressing rooms, so the visitors had to change from street wear to sporting at the Witter Hotel and run across the street.

Joe met Gatha Clark, his wife-to-be, at a basketball game in Marshfield. They were married in 1925.

When he was nearly 45 years old, Joe was working for a food company and still not too old to be playing baseball.

He also wasn't too old to be called for action as a machine-gunner with the 89th Air Force in World War II.

Joe spent more than a year in the Pacific, defending the Fiji Islands while the U.S. battled for the Solomon Islands.

"The Japs didn't last long when the B-17s starting bombing them and the Navy came in with the Grummans," he said. "They'd take off at 3 o'clock in the morning, and the sky would be lit up like day."

Meanwhile, Joe increased his proficiency at commerce. A colonel at a nearby base had a habit of calling him to ask, "How's the cigars?"

Joe would answer, "If you got Scotch or Canadian Club, we could do a business."

"You're holding me up, Joe," was the colonel's customary reply, "but I'll be right over."

"The PX guy stayed on the same base as I did," Joe said. "The other soldiers were allowed four cigars a week. I'd get 'em by the box. He was my buddy, you see."

After 1948, Joe operated a tavern in Oshkosh, which he left in 1952 when he and his family moved to Wisconsin Rapids. Here, he took a lease on a west-

side restaurant at which the former operator had gone broke.

"The equipment belonged to the finance company," he said. "Tables with marble tops and a great big soda fountain. 'We gotta have \$2,500 for the equipment,' they said. I said, 'Forget it. I'll give you 10 days to get it out.'"

"The next time I went up to the finance company, he said, 'Make it \$1,500.'"

"I said, 'No, just take it out.'"

He said, 'Give me \$250 cash, and you can have it.'

The two-story building housing the former grocery store was owned by the elderly Mrs. Jackan, who lived upstairs. A regular churchgoer, she told Joe, when he took the lease, "God must have sent you."

Before he opened up for business, so many high school kids stopped by that he thought (the story goes), "When I get them all in here, it'll be a chatter box."

And so it became the Chatter Box, and the name was well-known on both sides of the river. "When I'd go around town, the young people would even call me Joe Chatter Box," he said.

Besides young people, the clientele included mill workers and local businessmen, such as Bill Taylor and Bill Johnson. Neighborhood women often stopped by for bread and milk.

"I would sell maybe 70-100 Sunday papers. That's bringing in the people too."

On the 4th of July, Joe, Jim and Gay were busy vending fireworks.

Also popular throughout the year was merchandise that Joe might purchase in Mexico or a little closer. Religious "knick knacks" sold well with the local Catholics. "I'd bring back all these Madonnas and that," he said. "You could buy them for a dollar on North Third Street in Milwaukee, plastic, painted and decorated."

After leaving the Chatter Box, the Nuhliceks briefly operated "Jim and Joe's" restaurant on 4th Avenue. Joe moved to Abbotsford in 1970.

Of the Chatter Box, he said, "It was a good place. I made money. In those days, when you made \$100 clear, you had \$100 clear."

HANK

Nehring liked to ride with the wind

Hank told me there were some hard times when he was a kid.

Just after his April 1923 birth, his dad left Hank, his mother, older sister, brother, uncle and elderly grandparents in a two-room log cabin on the Marathon-Portage county line.

When Hank was five years of age, he said, President Roosevelt instituted a "mother's pension" that brought in \$25 a month, an improvement. "We ate a lot of dandelion greens and canned berries. I snared rabbits once in a while. We couldn't afford shotgun shells."

In 1992, at a time he was an almost-retired automobile mechanic, Henry Nehring, 1320 Apple Street, favored me with anecdotes from his finely-tuned memory.

In 1938, his family moved from a second home, this time in the Vesper area, to the west side of Powers Bluff, near Arpin, where Hank worked for "a buck a day, milking cows, picking rock, sawing wood or silo filling."

Later, he moved to Rapids, enlisting in what would be his lifetime profession of mechanic; the first 17 years were for Herb Nieman at two West Grand garages.

In 1962, Hank took over Herb's old station on Eighth Avenue and Grand, calling it Hank's Texaco.

When Texaco terminated the repair business, Hank moved four blocks down Grand to Twelfth Avenue, where

he ran another gas station/garage: Hank's DX

In 1973, self-service came in and DX sold the property. For a few years, Hank went to work for Ole Arneson's garage, retiring at age 61.

Fixing cars was a living but riding motorcycles was a life. In the early days they were always Harley-Davidsons, with nicknames like flathead, knucklehead, panhead and sprint.

"I wore boots, britches and a cloth or leather helmet with goggles," Hank said. "That was the Harley style then."

For a while, he belonged to the Wisconsin Rapids motorcycle club that met above the old Fischer's cycle shop but mostly he preferred riding on his own.

Hank got his first "motorcycle" at age 16, if that's what you call a bicycle with a motorcycle wheel on the back, powered by a Maytag washer motor his uncle got at Guarantee Hardware. With no clutch, it had to be started in gear.

"I would jump it off the stand," Hank said. "That way I'd go flying with it."

His first factory-made motorcycle, a 10-year-old 1928 Harley one-cylinder, was purchased from Lauby's in Marshfield. Not only was Hank lacking a driver's license, he didn't know how to ride a motorcycle.

The Laubys dropped him off at the south edge of Marshfield and Hank practiced all the way home.

At the Powers Bluff farm, Hank saw the barn light on and stopped to show off to Uncle Art, who came out with a lantern.

"I went to kick it over and there was nothing there," he said. "I held the lantern down by the transmission. There lay the clutch piece on the ground."

More misadventures followed. During a January thaw, Hank thought he'd drive from Arpin to visit his sister, who lived near the Moon pizzeria in Rapids. After supper, she looked out the window and told Hank, "You can't go home now. It's snowing out."

"About the third day, they were getting behind on their love life," said Hank, "so she talked me into starting back."

At 9 a.m., Hank, in a light jacket, wearing thin gloves, took off. With no windshield or goggles, he wasn't prepared for the minus-20 weather that had moved in.

To make matters worse, his cycle was on the blink. He'd go a little and it'd kill. Start again, go some more and kill.

After a frigid ride, Hank stopped at an old store at Eight Corners and hugged the stove for a while. Out of 20-some miles, he figured he walked about 15, arriving home after dark.

It could have been worse. "While you're pushin', it ain't as cold," he said.

The following spring, about 1940, going down a steep hill near Arpin, Hank threw his cycle into neutral and sat back, combing his hair, taking it easy, seeing how far he could coast.

Not far.

Striking a rock or stick, he went flying into the air and flipped, according to some "old maids" watching nearby, seven times.

Despite a flat tire and a head that kept falling to one side or the other, Hank picked up the motorcycle and rode into Arpin. "God, you must have taken a bad spill," said a friend at the ballpark. "Look at your face. It's all blood."

A glimpse at a mirror scared him further and Hank went looking for a doctor. But Dr. Ryan had gone to a ball game.

At Heuer's drugstore, a woman went for the bandages, but Hank lit out for Loken's gas station and caught a ride up to his farm. Finally, his uncle got him to Vesper and some attention from Dr. Carmichael.

Hank's head was still flopping around when he was taken home and put to bed with a hot water bottle. He later found he had broken both collarbones and some bones in his back, both of which cause some pain still.

Such incidents only fueled Hank's zest for the only sport he ever had, and his love for the thrill of going fast through the wind.

"I always felt safer on a motorcycle than a car," he said. "You're out in the rain where you can see everything. You got more room."

WAZECHA

Red was the color of my true love's feet

If you were a kid in the early 1950s, you loved the red beach.

On a blazing afternoon before air-conditioned kitchens, you splashed at the shore, imagining you were a crocodile, teasing sister while Mommy and baby played at water's edge, in the red sand.

This was Lake Wazeecha. "Wazeeka," as your tone-deaf cousin knew it. Or, according to an innocent young daughter, who pronounced it, years later, "Walzeecha."

Growing up around Rapids, this was the first lake and in some ways the best you would ever know: a sheen of (in the right light) blue water among green trees and fragrant parks, free and open to everyone. All play and no work.

Kind of like paradise.

Walzeecha.

But for you, a sometimes timid little boy, afraid of murky depths, green, clinging weeds and death (afraid of the shadows); for you came bad moments. As your dad pulled you from the safety of shallowness so you must learn to swim, you fought and cried out.

"I don't want to!"

Your dad took you fishing there at the lake. In the day, you jerked in small sunfish with a cane pole but at night you dreamed that, up along the pine-needled shores of the perfect lake, you brought ashore the world's biggest northern. They said there were big ones there in Wazeecha.

When you were of high school age, every chance you got, you rolled your swimming suit in a towel and rode your bike the long ways to Chestnut Street and out toward Kellner. You were bound not for the Red Beach for the closer, busier and cooler "White Sand Beach."

Visiting "the lake" had become a social event. The spacious beach, on any winsome, simmering afternoon, might be crowded with teenagers, the new transistor radios, and the aroma of coconut-based suntan oil. On a good day, everyone who mattered was there.

Kind of like a teenagers' paradise. Walzeecha.

One day though, the order came, "Clear the swimming area."

You watched them clenching hands in a chain and wading together from one side of the half-moon beach to the other.

"Some kid drowned." Some kid.

A woman struggled through the sand toward the water and fell to her knees.

"Sonny! Oh my God. Sonny!"

It's all right. They found the boy playing by the dam. This time.

Wazeeka.

If you were a little older, you parked your dad's station wagon up above and yourself on the hot white sand, admiring your own sun-broiled biceps and surveying cliques of bikini-clad playmates on rows of blankets.

Every day, the same girls at the same spot.

One night under the dark of the new moon, along a narrow, winding, black road, you stood safely back among trees. In the glare of headlights a small gang of Rapids boys jealously menaced the tent of strangers.

"Come out of there!" Plus obscenities.

A boy from somewhere else, maybe Point or Wausau, who had "hustled" the wrong Rapids girlfriend, emerged through the tent flaps, jabbing a wild, ripping chain saw.

A sudden gash brought blood but not much.

Quiet and darkness again. Wazeeka.

A college kid, driving your own '57 Ford, you could find beer parties, even

in broad daylight, along the north shore. Or you could join a few friends for skateboarding down the humps of the park roads, having fun, like little kids.

Just so you didn't stay after the midnight curfew. When the cops came one night, they caught quite a few pals, who got their names in the paper along with the amounts of their fines.

You disappeared into the woods, walking later down dark, unknown roads in the general direction of town.

Wazeeka.

As a young mill worker working the 3-to-11 shift in 100-plus temperatures, it was a quick drive out to run barefoot down the sandy beach, to dive into cold, still water, wearing sweat-soaked jeans and T-shirt, to rise up looking at stars.

As you were about to leave for the greater world, you sat with a friend at a picnic table, thinking about what had seemed like a long life in Rapids. Too soon over the sunset, the future.

You came back six years later for that first class reunion in the shelter house, as former lake people gathered in wonder over what had happened to them since.

You came back again with a visiting friend after a lot more years had passed, during the cool summer of 1992 when not a soul was to be seen near the murkier than ever waters and weeds of the sad old red beach.

You told him you had learned the eternal lake was actually shallow, narrow, manmade, and vulnerable to the whims of political climate. Born not long before you, it might even die first.

You reminisced, of course: about the time John swam across the lake and you raced him to the other side in the car and he won.

You remembered the night in May when you and Mike jumped in 38-degree water to open the season and the time when you were a kid swinging over the top of the hill. You could jump into the sky and land unhurt in the sand.

You came home with everything red, especially feet. Red sand all over. In your towel and suit, under fingernails, in your hair.

That's what happened when you went to the red beach anyway: Wazeeka.

Murgatroyd's THE ONE MILE BEFORE THE FLOOD

Wearing worn hockey skates stuffed with wool socks, his ankles wobbled as the blades scraped on the frozen road. He continued to walk on the skates into the deep snow of the dark, piney woods, down the bank and onto the open sky of the pond.

On the cleared ice, the metallic rhythm of the blades was the only sound. The earthy cold numbed his cheeks; the sharp stars showed there was a sparkly, infinitely mysterious universe up above.

Other times, the brightly-lighted pond swirled with strangers, and he left the larger pond to slip under the arched bridge and float down around the islands, in a winter wonderland where the shadows were deep and the ice was thin.

Most times, he skated until his feet were numb. At home, he sat on the floor in front of a furnace vent, rubbing his toes, waiting for prickly, burning pain to signal the return of circulation.

At the bank of the skating pond was the toboggan slide, used mostly for other devices, in those days steel-runners sleds. When the ramp was iced on a really good day, he could fly his sled face first down the bank, across the pond, and with a bump, over the far, western bank, past the dam and down again.

Of course, that winter-loving, lucky boy was, as usual in these chapters, me and I was fortunate to live across Two Mile Avenue from "Murgatroyd's."

According to a map I drafted in 1955 at the age of 10, before the age of correct spelling, the Murgatroyd's of my era was bounded on the east by

"Thaleckers," on the west by "Samson Street," and on the north by Two Mile Avenue. The far south, at the top of the map, was a blessed expanse of "woods."

Owner John Murgatroyd moved between the professions of insurance salesman, realtor, and visionary. His wife, Auril, operated the grounds of what they certainly denied was their "estate."

Their son, David, was two years older than I; Paul was four years older. The intellectual and curious Paul, a student of books and nature, became the main mentor of my innocent years.

Of interest were his collections, of cacti, coins, butterflies, stamps and the like. It was Paul who introduced me to the phrase, "Magyar Posta." He also liked to eat horseradish straight out of the bottle, a taste I am still cultivating.

Paul founded the Coot Club. Convening in a small green storage shed, the bulk of the membership at large was me, supplemented by the occasional visit by a younger neighbor, John Endrizzi.

The Coot Club specialized in bird watching. Kingfishers seemed to be our favorite sightings. Somewhere, I have a bird book in which I also claimed credit for tufted titmouse.

Throughout our ramblings, the One Mile "crick," damned to form a pond, was the focus of attention. In summer, frogs could be easily caught along the grassy banks. You grabbed them by their hips and hung on while they jerked slippery legs.

Turtles took a lot more stealth as they sunned at the point of one of the islands. You had to crawl stealthily out and wait for the sun to work its magic on the sleepy terrapin.

Below the dam, there were plenty of grasshoppers to be skewered with hooks made of pins and tossed with cane poles to hungry little bluegills.

There was swimming in the sandy, brown water, to a raft by the dam or from the small beach across the ponds. To land in ankle-deep mud on the far side marked a certain stage of maturity.

Near Two Mile Avenue was "the tennis court." It was black-topped with

basketball backboards at each end and an unlocked "shack" filled with sports equipment I was allowed to use.

To hit the ball over the high metal mesh fence was a home run. Into the creek was a Hank Aaron blast.

There was even a hint of the night life. In the attic over the garage was a pool table. The plaster ceiling was pockmarked with round holes where players had chalked their cues.

The Murgatroyds provided me with my first gainful employment: helping Paul weed the garden. Like all oldsters, I can tell you what I was paid: 10 cents.

Later, I mowed the extensive grassy areas along the creek, for \$1 per hour and a much-appreciated bottle of Orange Crush from the garage. Some of the time, I employed my younger brother, Gary, providing him his first job, at the basic rate of 10 cents per hour.

I wasn't the only one who enjoyed Murgatroyd's. The latest to tell me about it were the Rucinski kids, Joan, Pudge and Dave.

Dave said he, as I had, mowed the lawn, shoveled snow and performed other tasks. Joan Rucinski Fritsche said she used to baby-sit the Murgatroyd boys.

"I was supposed to give them a bath," she said. "I got Paul in the tub but Dave was out the back door."

"I found him down on the beach with no clothes on. He was going to go swimming."

The Rucinskis enjoyed the toboggan slide, careening down on garbage can lids, cardboard boxes or skates, when toboggans weren't available. They said they used to hang on to each other, three or four in a row on sleds.

One time, the same guy who had his little toe bit off by a snapping turtle in summer, hit a snow bank and ran a runner through his cheek. He went to the hospital, had his face sewed up and was back the next day.

He didn't want to miss the fun at Murgatroyd's. That night, they might make a fire and bring out marshmallows.

GOT'M!

Happy hunting at Devil's Elbow

He travels the great out-of-doors like a god. The wind cools him; the sun warms him; the path comes up to meet his footfall. Every scent of pitch and popple excites him. Bearing a weapon of power and beauty, the hunter is a happy man.

I know, because in my innocent Wisconsin youth, I was a hunter. You will laugh to read about the fun I had and what I shot.

My first good weapon came in a cardboard box under the Christmas tree. The Daisy lever-action Long Rifle BB gun was one of the best things I've ever had. It looked like a gunfighter's friend and dependably shot a little high and to the right. In time, I was able to forgive its plastic stock.

With a Montgomery Ward catalog for a backstop, I practiced shooting in the basement.

Got'm!

Blew a hole right through the modeling clay soldier.

It was fun to get together with my cousin and shoot at sparrows where they twittered like a gaggle of consultants high above in the sun-streaked hayloft of Grandpa's barn. When one stuck out its neck too far ...

Got'm!

If it wasn't dead yet when it hit the hay, my cousin twisted its head off rather than waste a BB.

It was also fun to tramp with friends through Swamp Valley, where One Mile Creek flowed into the Two Mile. Or to skirt the Bulls Eye Country Club on posted Nekoosa-Edwards Paper Co. land, like revolutionaries choosing victims from an effete, putting plutocracy.

And deep in the woods, at path-side pools along the One Mile Creek, we paused. Looking down at black pools, we could see the double eye bumps of frogs poking through.

Got'm!

But for novice nimrods totin' Daisies, the best and most sporting target was the chipmunk. You could follow the chirp from a quarter-mile away to a brush pile or roots of a tree, where it stupidly chattered.

Chip! Chip!

Got'm!

Besides the fun he had enjoyed personally, the hunter had rid the township of a menace for which he was paid a nickel bounty each. It felt good to be earning some honest money. A nickel would buy a packet of BBs to start over.

But the BB was light armament compared to the "recurve" bow that arrived through the mail. It was made of smooth, green fiberglass, with a sturdy leather hand grip.

I practiced in the back yard by having a friend spin paper plates one at a time across a couple bales of hay. As often as not, I was able to stick the plates against the hay without hitting Pete at all.

Got'm!

My final and most effective weapon was a Marlin .22 bolt action, clip-loading rifle. The .22 had a luxurious wood stock and a tiny peep sight through which I could barely see.

With the handsome and powerful armament, I often found myself down the lane at grandpa's farm, pausing to aim at a sparrow on a fence post.

From next to my ear came the report of the weapon, but far away, almost in another world, the target exploded in a puff like an overcharged popcorn kernel.

Got'm!

When I was old enough to get a license, Dad took me down by Devil's Elbow. He had heard from some millwright or pipefitter that there was a whole subdivision of wild game down there.

Though I was underage, he let me drive the back roads as yet unpolluted by out-of-state four-wheel drives. While Dad napped, I explored the scrub oak and jack pine flats around Petenwell to my heart's content.

Got'm!

Have you ever watched a gray squirrel fall from high in an oak tree? It

can be quite graceful, an airborne ballet. The furry muff clings to one branch, then twirls blissfully through the air to a lower branch, hangs delicately for a moment, as if waiting for applause, then drifts down to the next lower stage until finally it settles almost silently on the leaves below.

Outdoor writers have a good point when they say there is a lot of beauty in nature and hunting.

Making the rounds on Grandpa's farm one dewy morning, I turned the corner of the house and saw a rabbit on the front lawn. It stupidly continued to munch dandelions as I raised the rifle and centered the bead on its face.

Pop.

Got'm!

Just like that.

The peaceful early morning seemed to absorb the sound. The voice in my head was quiet, too. There was a religious feeling to it, sort of like they described in the outdoor page of the *Daily Tribune*.

But what was I to do with a dead bunny before breakfast? I dragged it over to the bushes.

Some time before that, I had hunted at the old prisoner of war camp just off Two Mile Avenue at the airport. Somebody was with me as we treed a squirrel in a small maple tree, near a graffiti-scrawled cement bunker.

It was fun for the two of us to pepper that squirrel with BBs. We just kept shooting until it finally dropped to the ground.

Got'm!

We hauled it home and laid it at the side of the garage. Compared to chipmunks, it was something to brag about. A true hunter would have mounted it over the fireplace.

But the excitement wasn't over.

The squirrel started to move. It got up and looked around. While we watched, it staggered a little, looked our way, perked up and scooted down the driveway back toward the airport.

We didn't even shoot; we were that surprised.

If May follows April

*And
maybe
it will*

Spoken at the Wisconsin Rapids
United Methodist church, March 10,
1999

As I look around this room, I see a lot of beautiful people. I see some of the best friends and neighbors in the world. I see the relatives I always see in churches like this. I see a crowd of faces.

But to me, without that little white-haired lady, this joint is empty. It's a ghost town.

I remember coming here with her on a weekday—to this church that she loved and of which she has been so much a part.

The sanctuary was quiet and peaceful.

All the rooms were quiet and peaceful.

There was no one else in the building. You could say it was empty. But it was not empty. She filled it. She filled it with something you cannot see.

One little white-haired lady comes in the door...Arline Emily Silly "Sally" Sylvester Engel.

Mama didn't dance that day but the joint was full of life. Mama didn't sing that day but the joint was full of spirit. In a very quiet, modest, private way, the joint was rockin'.

When Sally was there...

That little lady: she was big. I won't say she was another George

Washington or Abe Lincoln. Those guys were each a foot plus taller than she was. Clinton is a foot-plus taller than she was.

And, I won't even say she *always* told the truth, like they did. On her driver's license, she stated she was five feet three inches in height. She had always told me she was five feet two. If the truth be known, she was less than five feet tall.

But she was a gentle giant. She was a miracle worker. She filled up a church by being there.

She brought this whole town to life.

If there was no Sally Engel...

If she wasn't here and there and everywhere:

On her way to McMillan Library for books or a program; to Riverview Hospital for volunteer work or to visit a friend; to the United Methodist church for Sunday service or for a Wednesday luncheon; on her way to the Mead Inn on Friday morning or somewhere that evening for a fish fry; to the Country Kitchen for lunch; the Imperial House; to the Little Pink Restaurant; to McDonald's with her granddaughter because "Daddy" won't go there; to the Odd Fellows lodge that her husband was so instrumental in building; to see Marge or Hazel or Irma or Bernice or Gina or Auril or Marcia or Velma or any of the friends in the card parties and circles and widows' clubs.

Why would they have a Wisconsin Rapids if not for that little white-haired lady?

Why would the sun come up without Sally Engel? For me, it never has. Not in my lifetime.

She loved a sunny day, but not a cloudy one. She would have loved this day and insisted that I love it too. "Miss me but don't mourn me," she instructed in her last wishes.

"Miss me but don't mourn me."

Did I mention that she was a brilliant crossword puzzle player?

What's a five-letter word meaning to feel or express grief or sorrow: M-o-u-r-n. If you aren't going to mourn for *her* why do they have a word for it?

Last time I spoke to this congregation was May, 1991. It was for my dad:

Donald Engel. And just this week, I noticed that Mom had glued the base of his framed portrait to the radio by her bed so the frame would stand up, so she could look at it every morning and so she could look at it every night before she went to sleep.

It was probably the last thing she saw.

In my remarks about my dad, eight years ago, I mentioned that he had been worrying about his lawn sprinklers. Right up until his last lucid moment, he was making plans to get those lawn sprinklers organized.

Sure enough, after he was gone, she had the lawn trenched and fancy new pop-up sprinklers put in. As Don would have wanted.

But what good are those sprinklers now? Why waste the electricity to turn on the water? If she isn't there? What good is it to have a 439 Two Mile Avenue if that little white-haired lady doesn't live there?

On our last trip together, to Menasha to visit with her sister, Florence, Mom looked at a side road near Waupaca. This one went around a small wooded hill and out of sight down the Tomorrow River valley and she said what she has said hundreds of times, "I always wanted to take that road" and yes, she had taken many similar roads in her lifetime.

"Maybe in spring," she said, "I will see where it goes."

Now, why would they have...

Why would they have roads like that, if not for that little white-haired lady?

If April follows March and I'm not sure it will this year.

And if May follows April and maybe it will.

And if there is a spring in which begonias again by back steps bloom...

If there is spring, there will be the Tomorrow River valley and if there is a Tomorrow River valley and if we went by Waupaca and if we found the time to turn on that pretty country road my mother saw...

Then maybe we could comprehend what fine vistas she knew there were—around that bend and over that hill.

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View from above

Photos show city in the woods

If you're over forty, you probably remember with some fondness the home town that formerly existed here. Wisconsin Rapids, in demographic terms, displayed a typical layout of the times—with one major exception, the division by the wide Wisconsin River into two distinct shopping districts, the East Side and the West Side.

As described on page 88, the West Side as we knew it, was built in 1925 and functioned until the opening of the Rapids Mall August 16, 1978, although it is obvious that buildings had been disappearing for years, largely to provide parking.

C. 1925

Page 82

Consolidated Papers, Inc. Photo

The MacKinnon Block, center, on the river bank, was cleared by Consolidated as part of long-term urban renewal and river bank park program. The next block of miscellaneous storefronts to the west was demolished in 1925 and replaced by the River Block shopping center. This photograph probably was purposefully taken to illustrate a "before" scene.

See *The Fat Memoirs*, p. 92, for more information.

C. 1926

Page 81

CPI Photo

Looking across Grand Avenue from the First National Bank (Firststar) to the Mead-Witter Block. Note brick pavement and streetcar (1910-1931) tracks.

A 1941 directory for this block names ground floor businesses: F.W. Woolworth Co., A&P, Berntsen's Women's Apparel, Whitrock's Pharmacy, Western Union, Abel's Clothes Shop, Arnold Barber Shop, D&M Beauty shop, the Rapids Bakery, Wilpolt's Restaurant, Fritz & Pete's Billiard Hall, Travelers Insurance/First Bond & Mortgage Co., and offices upstairs.

Page 83

CPI Photo

A 1941 directory lists, for the Consolidated-built River Block (proceeding from east to west): Heilman's, Germann's Jewelry Store, Rapids Shoe Store, Singer Sewing Machine, Fey Photo, China & Art Shop, Laramie and Haefner Barber Shop, Ford-Hopkins Drug Store, West Side Branch Library.

1939

Veteran's Hospital Presentation

See Page 46

Pre-World War II view suggests that the "Tri-Cities" were a series of distinct northwoods outposts, each clustered around a paper mill, the introduction of overpopulation and urban sprawl barely perceptible.

Page 19: Looking upstream from Nekoosa.

Page 20: Looking northwest at Port Edwards.

Page 21: Tri-City Airport looking to northeast from area of Nepco Lake at what was then the township of Grand Rapids.

Page 22: Looking northwest from somewhere near present Lincoln High School toward former Lincoln (East Junior High) at left center.

Page 23: Lincoln High School and fieldhouse (East Jr. High), center. Witter vocational school and Wood County teachers college, to

right. Top right, Witter Field. (McMillan library is now, 1999, at lower center.)

Page 24: Downtown in its prime. Prominent along Grand Avenue are Johnson Hills, Mead Witter Block, River Block and Nash Block. On the East Bank, the Witter Hotel and Flatiron Building. Note the lack of parking lots.

1950

Page 95

South Wood County Historical Corp. photo

The Mead Inn opened in 1951. At bottom, center, it can be seen under construction to the left of the "old" Methodist church. Prominent at center is Hotel Witter, being replaced by "The Mead."

1955

Page 96

SWCHC photo

Jackson Street Bridge (1955) and Wood County Courthouse (1956-under construction) are major landmarks. Note the clearing of river banks for parks.

1963

Page 97

SWCHC photo

Wisconsin Rapids prior to Rapids Mall. Note prominence of parking lots, railroad tracks and increasingly mall-like appearance of downtown layout.

Page 98

SWCHC photo

The West Side, looking south. Note the circular Daily Tribune building on the riverbank. The Wisconsin Theatre, built in two sections, and the Palace Theatre, can be seen in the same block, at left center.

In the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*

1986

Charlie Brock, Lambeau, Packers November 15, 22

1991

William Suckow	January 19
Emily Bell	January 26
Bernard Janskovich, Burma	February 2, 9
Idelle Kolstra	May 18
Joe Nuhlicek	August 10
Pearl Harbor memories	December 14

1992

Dave Patrykus	January 25, February 1
Bernard Zylstra	February 2, 8
Papermakers Union	March 28
Consolidated unions	April 4
Consolidated unions	April 11
George Mead, downtown	April 25
Ezra Maeder, unions	April 18
Nepco union	June 20
Nepco union	July 4
Theaters	July 18
Theodore Walrath, downtown	August 15
Lake Wazeecha	September 5
Hank Nehring	October 17
Odd Fellows	December 19

1993

Wes Snyder, Preway	October 16
Rucinski, Two Mile	November 20
Murgatroyd's, Two Mile	December 18

1994

Parks	February 5
Mead Inn	March 19
Jackson Street Bridge	May 7
Veterans Hospital (proposed)	June 18
Laura Corrigan	August 6, 20
Downtown	October 15
Downtown II	November 5
Downtown III	November 19
Rapids theater	December 3
Christmas	December 17

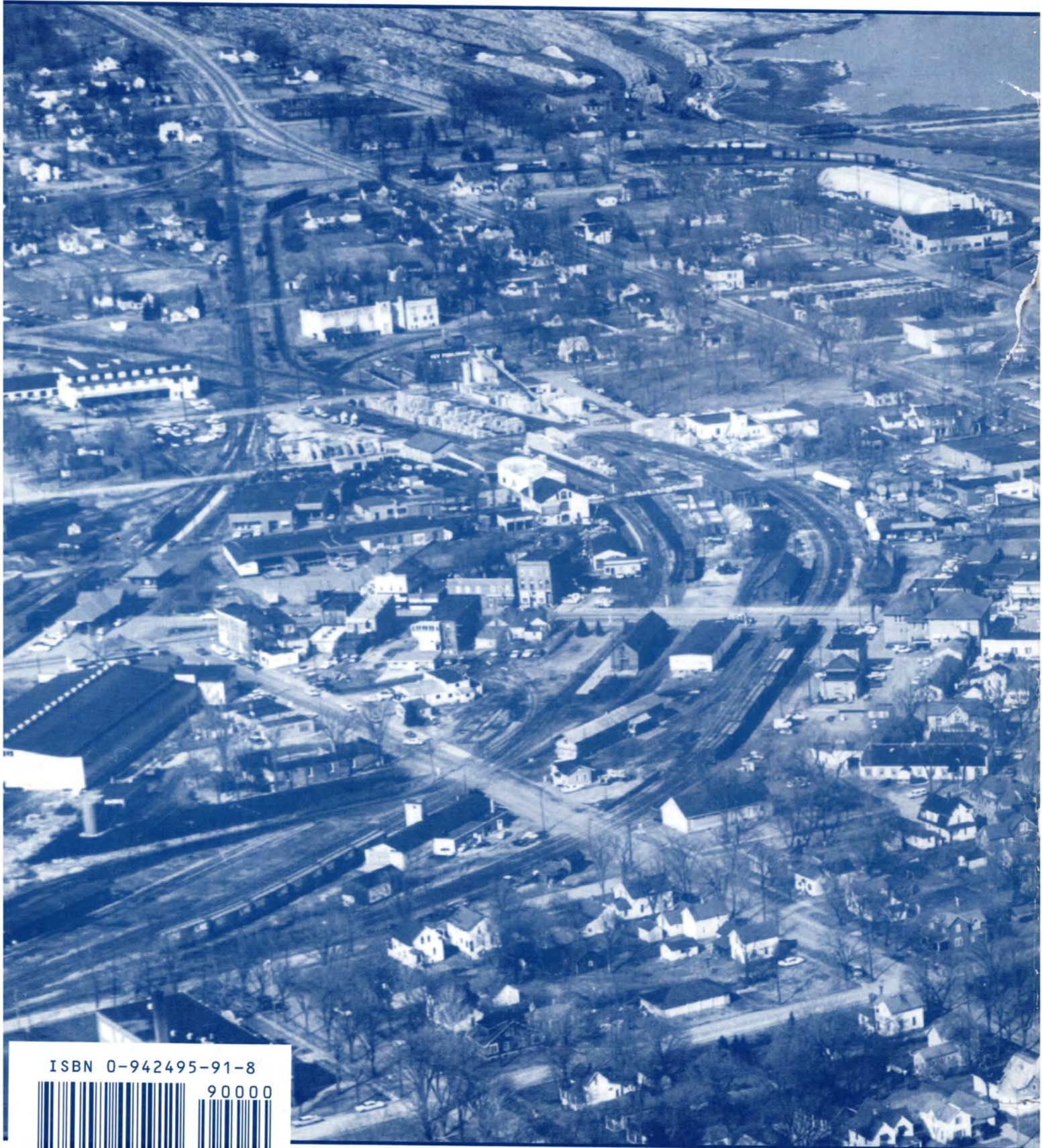
1995

WSAU	January 21
American POWs	September 8
WWII industries	October 7
Hotel Romanski	October 21
Got'm	November 18

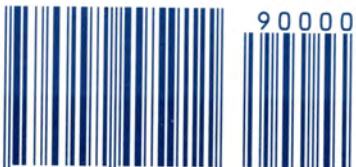
1998

Sesquicentennial Memoirs (1948) Saturdays

Dave Engel



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