River City Memoirs

Dave Engel


RIVER CITY
MEMOIRS

Published by the
South Wood County Historical Corp.

With a sponsoring grant from
Consolidated Papers Foundation, Inc.
Wisconsin Rapids, Wisconsin

Text printed on Consolidated
Enamel Printing Papers
Frostbrite Coated Matte, Basis 70

River City MEMOIRS

by Dave Engel

A Series 1980-1982

In the Wisconsin Rapids *Daily Tribune*

Research Resources:

Walter Braun, Wood County Register of Deeds
Debra Brehmer, *Scope*
Ramon Hernandez, McMillan Memorial Library
William F. Huffman Jr., *The Daily Tribune*
James Kubisiak, Wisconsin Rapids
Daniel P. Meyer, Consolidated Papers, Inc.
Leland Pomainville, SWCHC
Ellen Sabetta, SWCHC
Barbara Wolden, Grand Rapids/Centralia

Library of Congress Catalog Card Number:
83-50738
ISBN: 0-910122-68-7

South Wood County Historical Corp.
540 3rd St. S.
Wisconsin Rapids, WI 54494

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Dave Engel & Diedrich Knickerbocker

"What important beings are we historians! We are the sovereign censors who decide upon the renown or infamy of our fellow mortals—we are the benefactors of kings—we are the guardians of truth—we are the scourgers of guilt—we are the instructors of the world—we are—in short, what we are not!"

Diedrich Knickerbocker

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7. Roche House, Wm. Roche.
8. Tannery, D. P. Merrill.
9. Rablin House.
10. Green Bay & Minnesota R. R. Depot.

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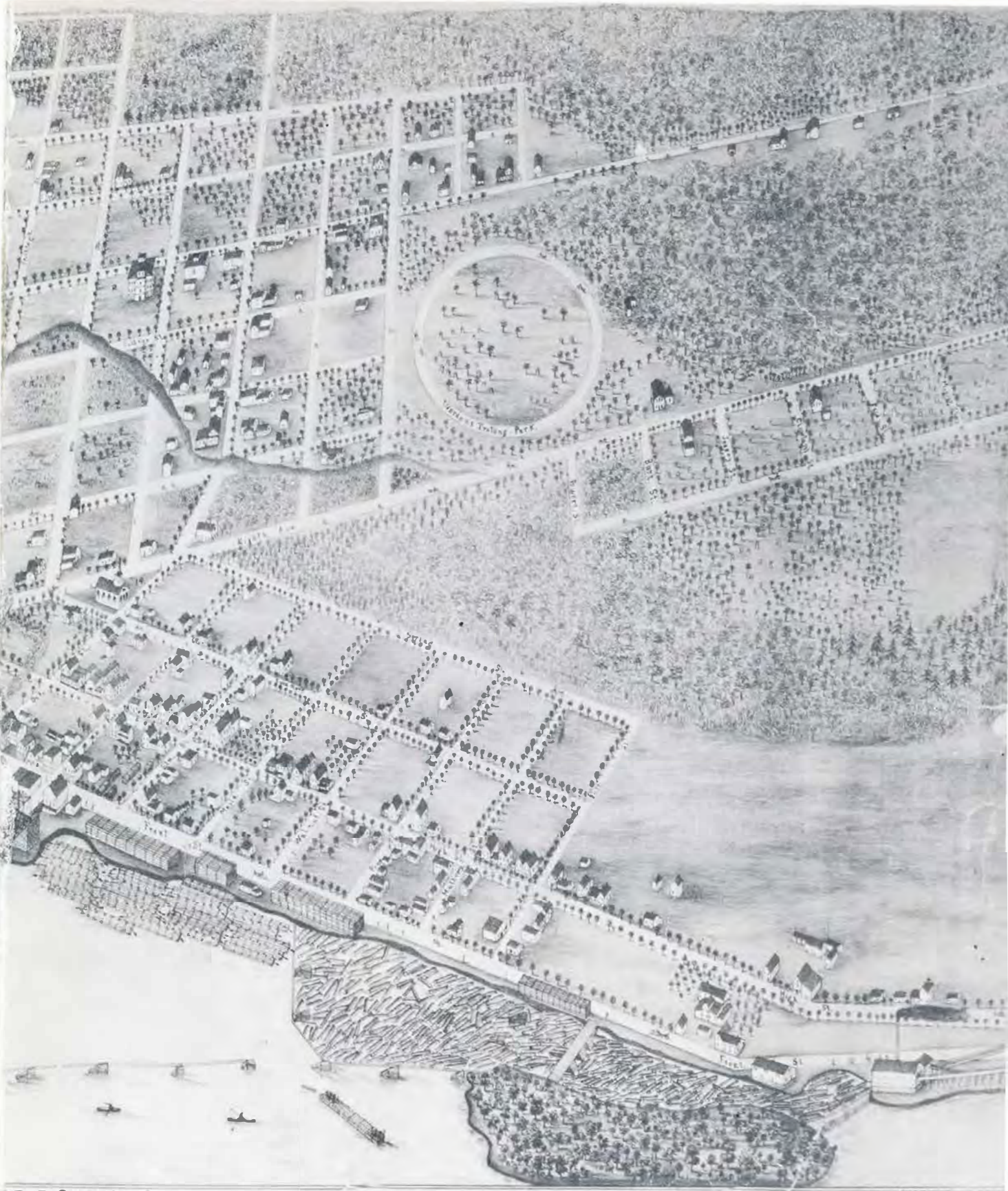

THE CITY OF

RAPIDS.

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11 First National Bank,
12 Bank of Grand Rapids
13 Congregational Church, Rev R M Webster
14 Methodist Church, Rev Jesse Cole
15 Catholic Church, S S Peter & Paul, Rev Wm DeKelver
16 City Livery Stable, R W Lyon
17 Planing Mill & Sash Factory, John Rablin
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19 Music Hall, R C Worthington Prop
20 Steam Fire Engine House

Turtle City Memoirs

The French refer disparagingly to the "memoire de lievre"—memory of rabbit, held by those who in one litter cannot recall the last. Such are the hare-brained among us who have converted our town into a concrete yet evanescent warren.

The rapid metamorphoses bewilder the casual or intermittent observer. Consider, for example, the town drunk, who believes himself a world traveller. At bar time, he passes out. In the morning, all the buildings he had come to know the day before have been exchanged for a new set.

Our aim in these pages is to sift the dust of our fast friends (they die young) and dwell in the memory of turtle—"memoire de tortue der mer." A mud down at Wakely's. A snapper savoring some German's calf at Kellner. A painted box twinkling in the Doudville sun. We too will retract our horny heads and see without seeing the transient but immutable geography of a past called "River City."

Chapter One

SEQUENCE

Chapter One

SEQUENCE

1850: Enumeration

It has been stated that the United States is the first country that started counting itself as soon as it was founded. The town of Grand Rapids, which encompassed the area now including Wisconsin Rapids, followed that example.

Grand Rapids was first enumerated in 1850. The community was barely a decade old, having begun as a sawmill operation in the late 1830's. The census records "free inhabitants" in the town of Grand Rapids, Portage County (Wood County was not established until 1856). Marshals of the U.S. Judicial districts supervised the 1850 operations. Enumerators and counters were deputy marshals. Statistics for Portage County were "enumerated by me, Tho's McDill, ass't marshal."

The 1850 census was the first to include immigration and nativity (place of birth) statistics. This information, along with other data, presents Grand Rapids as a typical lumbering town of the mid-19th Century.

Categories of information recorded included:

Dwelling houses "numbered in the order of visitation"; age, color (white, black or mulatto) and sex of each resident; profession, occupation or trade "of each male person over 15 years of age."

Value of real estate; place of birth; those "married within the year;" those who "attended school within the year;" persons over 20 years of age who cannot read and write; and "whether deaf and dumb, blind, insane, idiotic, pauper or convict."

Real estate "of value" was listed for 15 owners. Most "valuable" were holdings in the names of J.H. Compton, $2,000; M. Labruche, $1,000; H. Clinton, $2,000; William Roe, $1,000; A. Anthony, $1,000; Robert Wakely, $3,000; and Francis Biron, $2,000.

The town was predominantly young. An approximate tabulation shows that, of a total of 342 residents, 149 were between the ages of 20 and 29. The next most populous age group was 30-39, with 52. There was no baby boom, however, with only 46 children under the age of 10 recorded and 37 who were between the ages of 10 and 19.

Ten riverbank residents fit the 40-49 age category. Six were 50-59 and only four were counted as being over 60. Oldest by far was an 85-year-old Canadian named P. Tebo.

There was not likely to be a baby boom soon, either. Some 266 males had to vie for the favors of 76 females. As for "color," none was indicated. Apparently, the immigrants were uniformly "white."

Approximately 200 men were listed as laborers—predominantly sawmill workers, lumberjacks and rafters. Their bosses, the "lumbermen," numbered 18.

Other occupations, typical of the times, were represented by five blacksmiths, five carpenters, two merchants, two tavernkeepers, two millrights and one shoemaker. Only two farmers were counted.

A call might have gone out for a schoolmaster, particularly for remedial writing and reading of English. A total of seven children had attended school in the past year. Of the adults, 63 were termed illiterate.

Not one citizen of the youthful town admitted to having been married in the past year, just as none admitted to being deaf, dumb or idiotic.

As in most of the upper Midwest, the majority of new settlers came from the eastern states or Canada. A significant number came from the British Isles and Illinois. A scant 38 had been born in Wisconsin. Germany had yet to become predominantly reflected in the area's population and the Scandinavian immigration to central Wisconsin hadn't begun.

Peopling the wilderness was like starting a colony on the moon. The crew, for the most part, was male, white and young. And, everyone had landed from somewhere else.

1857: Handbook to the Pinery

"Merry Christmas," inscribed Joseph Wood in the small book with the large title: "Hand-Book of Stevens Point and the Upper Wisconsin: Its Character, Early Settlement, Villages, Population & General Advantages for Settlers."

Wood was motivated at least in part by self-interest. One of the advertisements included in the back pages was his own: "Joseph Wood, General LAND AGENT, Grand Rapids; Portage, Adams & Wood Counties. Will attend to the location of Land, Examination of Titles, and Payment of Taxes."

As a reference, Wood listed the author of the "Hand-Book," "Hon. A.G. Ellis, Receiver U.S. Land Office, Stevens Point, Wis."

When Wood mentioned "Wood" County, he was talking about a brand-new county (1856) named after himself. It was Joseph Wood who introduced the bill in the state Legislature calling for its formation, although he had modestly suggested "Greenwood County."

One of the first "boosters" of northern Wisconsin, Ellis strove to correct the opinion that the pinery was an immense and miasmatic morass. The rise of European industrial culture began, wrote Ellis, in 1831, with the application by Daniel Whitney, a Green Bay commercial magnate, for a permit to erect a sawmill and to cut timber. The mill was built by 1832, south of "Point Bas" (Nekoosa). "Messrs. Grignon & Merrill obtained a similar permit," wrote Ellis, "and built a mill at Grignon's Rapids (Port Edwards) in 1836."

The 1836 Indian Treaty for land three miles each side of the Wisconsin River had been written "specifically to open the country to the lumbermen." After the treaty, the river was quickly explored and "Messrs. Bloomer & Strong, and also Geo. Cline, occupied Grand Rapids. Fay, Kingston & Draper occupied Biron's Rapids. A. Brawley commenced at Mill Creek; also Perry & Veeder on the same stream."

A complete survey followed, executed by Ellis and Joshua Hathaway. In 1840, "the whole tract was offered at public sale at Mineral Point."

"The 'Wisconsin Pineries' became known throughout the whole North-west; the lumber from them furnishing materials for improving and rendering habitable the immense prairie worlds of Illinois, Iowa and Missouri."

By the writing of the "Hand-Book," in 1857, there was located along "the worst rapids, all things considered, on the whole River to pass lumber over," "a fine town growing up, and numerous mills, dams, wing dams, booms, &c. comprising the various and extensive lumbering establishments of the vicinity . . . . The Wisconsin, above Point Bas, is a succession of rapids and eddies; most of the former surge over rocky bottoms, with a wild current of ten to twenty miles an hour, the channel broken and divided, offering almost insurmountable obstacles to anything like navigation: yet over all these the lumber has to pass."

Partially because of the transportation obstacle and because of the water-power opportunity, the village, named for the Grand Rapids, flourished.

Already the county seat, Grand Rapids had a population of "about 1,000" and "187 buildings of all kinds."

Besides residences, a Catholic church and two public schools, "The place contains," wrote Ellis, "1 drug store, 6 variety stores, and 5 grocery and provision stores: 5 taverns, 2 saloons, 2 law, 4 justices offices, 3 black-smith shops, 2 carpenter shops, 2 shoe shops, 1 wagonmakers shop, 2 tailors, 1 cabinet maker, 1 bakery, 2 lawyers and two physicians."

Ellis counted eight prosperous sawmills in eight miles from Grand Rapids to Point Bas, and six steam-powered mills nearby, producing a total of 19 million board feet per year, in addition to 3 million sawn at "the extensive lumbering establishment of Francis Biron." Besides lumber, "immense" quantities of shingles were manufactured, "probably not less than 42,000,000."

At this rate, admitted Ellis, "It is frequently observed that the timber will soon be exhausted. That it must finally fail, is of course certain; but that period is so remote as to have no practical bearing on the investment of capital for present operations."

1869: Incorporation

What were you doing the day River City celebrated its centennial? In fact, when did the city of Wisconsin Rapids turn 100?

If you don't know, your ignorance may be excused. The event passed without official notice. That it was omitted could be attributed to confusion arising from the various name changes and annexations occurring since incorporation in 1869. That no one noticed could be accounted for by preoccupation with the contemporary.

To be charitable, April 6, 1969, the appropriate anniversary of our town, fell on Easter Sunday.

Neither do we recall, in 1979, any notice of the celebration or commemoration of 110 years of official community.

In 1981, Mayor James Kubisiak realized the omission and held a belated centennial on what actually was the 112th birthday of the city. A birthday cake was divided among city employees, and the Daily Tribune noted the event with a photograph.

Back in 1956, when Wood County marked its first 100 years, the celebration was countywide and the Daily Tribune, in conjunction with the Marshfield News-Herald, published a special commemorative edition.

"It was not until 30 years after the first settlement was established that, in 1868, the proposition of incorporating Grand Rapids as a village or seeking a city charter was introduced and submitted to a vote of the people," stated the Tribune.

"The majority were in favor of a city form of government, and the charter was formally granted on April 6, 1869," continued the account. "The first City Council meeting was held April 13 of that year with Mayor L.P. Powers presiding. C.O. Baker was city clerk and members of the council were Aldermen Stevenson, Ebert, Norton, Hasbrouck and Neeves."

The original story in the 1881 *History of Northern Wisconsin* went like this.

"In 1868, there was a suggestion made by the residents, that the village of Grand Rapids be incorporated, that they might receive all the advantages from which they were debarred while under town government. The question was agitated, which finally culminated in a final meeting being held, and votes cast to decide whether the present village of Grand Rapids and county seat of Wood County should petition for a charter to incorporate said county seat as a village or appeal for a city charter. The majority were in favor of a city corporation, and the petition was forwarded to the proper authorities for consideration,"

According to "The History of Northern Wisconsin," however, Seth Reeves, not L.P. Powers, was the first mayor. Reeves, as is written in records kept in the archives of City Clerk Robert Boyarski, was elected April 6, along with the several aldermen.

After the organization of the city, the first business was to pass an ordinance.

"Required to be paid for license, for the sale of strong, spiritous, ardent, or intoxicating liquors to be drunk on the premises in a quantity less than one gallon," was a license fee of $100.

The first applicants were F. Pomainville, W. Balougier, Joseph Russell, Frank Russell, Tim Daly and E. La Bleux.

In April meetings, the council elected A. Pierce city marshal, L. Mosher city treasurer, H.B. Philleo police justice and Dr. G.F. Witter city physician to "doctor city poor for the sum of $75 per year."

The vote for city attorney ended in a tie between V.M. Webb and L.P. Powers, and was postponed. The salary would have been $150, presumably for a year.

A highway tax of "7 mills" on the dollar was passed as well as a "bill entitled an ordinance to prevent the selling vending or giving away strong, spiritous or intoxicating liquors on Sunday," introduced by Alderman Powers.

Street improvement was the order of the day on May 18 when the council entertained a "petition praying for the laying out and establishing of an alteration of Front Street and continuation of said street usually designated as the upper Plover Road also lower River Road or Biron's Road leading up the river on the NE side of Rablin's Hotel."

With the approach of the 113th birthday of our town, we may observe that, two months after its incorporation, an ordinance to prevent the running at large of hogs in the city was passed.

At that meeting, an ordinance also was passed providing for the numbering of ordinances.

The government was in full operation.


HAHLIN HOUSE

1869: Ordination

In 1870, no law said the miscreant could not spit on the new sidewalks, as long as the spitting could not be considered lascivious nor the spitter drunk.

Shortly after the first city council meeting on April 13, 1869, an ordinance went into effect prohibiting rioting, drunkenness and miscellaneous improper conduct commonly termed "lewd." Violations of this law could be punished by a fine of from $1 to $50.

The selling, vending or giving away of "any strong spirits or intoxicating liquor" on Sunday was forbidden, subject to the seller's loss of license. Further temperance of the local Dionysians was attempted in an ordinance of April 19, 1870, closing, after the hour of 10 p.m. billiard rooms where "spiritous, vinous or malt liquors" were retained and rooms wherein games for amusement were played. The ordinance, however, was marked "repealed."

More ordinances "to provide against the evils resulting from the sale of intoxicating liquors" included prohibitions against selling to minors, persons intoxicated and habitual drunkards. All establishments in violation, whether "taverns, saloons, restaurants, groceries, drug stores, coffee houses, cellars, and other places of public resort," could be declared public nuisances.

It also became unlawful "within this city for any person to become intoxicated." Upon arrest, the offender was required to, "on oath," disclose where and how the sale was made. The vendor "causing" the intoxication was liable to penalties similar to those inflicted on the drunkard. Husbands and wives were encouraged to testify against their spouses.

As a citizen under certain influences might go wild, so too his brutish counterparts known collectively as "livestock." An ordinance for the prevention of swine running at large within the limits of the city of Grand Rapids, in any of the streets, squares, lanes or alleys, was passed by the council on June 1, 1869.

Soon cattle were added to swine, and quickly "any ox, cow, bull, steer, stag or heifer" could not "run at large" in selected portions of Grand Rapids in the period from Dec. 1 to April 1. The list grew longer, including "any horse, colt or mule."

Perhaps in small part to avoid the offal leavings of these beasts of burden, sidewalks were ordered constructed by the landowners at their expense, of plank two inches in thickness and laid upon proper sleepers. Also in the interest of transportation safety were ordinances prohibiting horse racing and "immoderate" driving, jumping onto any sleigh or cutter without consent of the owner by anybody under the age of 15, and approaching the bridge at a speed faster than a walk (measured presumably in equine strides).

Public safety was to be further insured by the banning of firecrackers "or other explosive in or upon any of the principal streets of the city." "Shooting off or discharge of any firearm" also was illegal.

A "common prostitute plying her vocation at any house of ill fame or bawdy house" could be subject to a fine of at least $10. Whether this motion against debauchery succeeded is not evident. That the attempt to squelch inebriation met the usual fate can be inferred from a July 23, 1872, report that "H.P. Freeman" had been selling liquor without a license and that "O. Voyer" opened his saloon on Sunday last.

On July 31, 1876, "a certain man, being present, makes some apologies, admitting that he had been intoxicated as charged and promised that if the Council would give him another trial, he would not touch another drop of liquor while in the employ of the city."

A merciful council told him he had one more chance. A just council, on Nov. 2, 1876, fired the hapless tippler and vowed to hire a "new man to run the city steamer." The municipal conscience attempted to temper the intemperate by proclamation and ordinance; in the end, it could only judge and dismiss.

1871: Pigeon Pot Pie

Practically all the passenger pigeons left in the world, an estimated 136 million, came to Central Wisconsin in 1871.

"At that time the land all around where the Howe school is located was a dense forest thickly wooded with poplars," said Clarice Coty Arpin, in "The History of Wood County (1923)," "and for two seasons great flocks of pigeons flew here and roosted in the trees."

Mrs. Arpin said many people would shake down squabs by the wagonload, take them home and keep them in barns or sheds to kill them whenever they wished a feast.

The nesting of 1871 was one of the largest recorded. The Wood County Reporter of that year noted the progression, on March 16. "Several flocks of pigeons were observed last Tuesday morning flying Southward. Weather prophets say their early flight predicts early spring.

"Farmers are complaining bitterly of the damage being done by the millions of pigeons which have made their headquarters at or near Friendship, and make marauding expeditions every morning with the regularity and certainty of a Sherman Bummer. Fields of wheat are being completely spoiled, and all grain sown is as good as lost to the husbandman.—Hundreds of flocks may be seen every morning flying to the northwest, to feed on the acorns of the oak forests in the western portions of the County, and returning with the approach of night.

"Never mind," philosophized the Reporter. "If it weren't us 'twould be somebody else. Enjoy pot pie, and make the best of a misfortune."

At the end of April, the air was "monopolized by the millions of pigeons, which have suddenly appeared from somewhere." It seemed like the whole town was "off shooting, and every available shooting iron from a fourth of July anvil down to an ear syringe is brought into requisition. Guns without stock, lock or barrel, are sought for by amateurs, and experts say that clubs loaded with muscle are just as effectual as fine shot."

It had got to the point, complained the Reporter, that pigeon pot pie was getting to be a nuisance.

Young pigeons, or squabs, were of special interest to the gourmand. The Reporter defined squab as "a pigeon that has not passed the line of accountability." With tongue in cheek, it added, "Squabs are said to be good to eat. They are as plenty as counterfeit currency at a circus door."

The pigeons had gone by May 18, "flown to some other quarter of the globe, leaving their young to begin life for themselves. The husbandman rejoices."

A journalist gave his impressions of a hunt in the Feb. 20, 1871, Fond du Lac "Commonwealth." "Embarking on the 10 A.M. train, we found on board a party, like ourselves, headed for the great pigeon roost, stretching from Kilbourn City on the Wisconsin River, for scores of miles beyond . . . ."

The hunters stayed overnight and arose before dawn to await the waking of the birds. During an "indescribable" period of cooing sounds, the hunters found their sites and prepared for the shoot.

But nothing had prepared them for the terrific roar of the black cloud of pigeons that passed in the gray light of morning. Some of the men were so stunned they dropped their weapons and ran for shelter. "So sudden and unexpected was the shock that nearly the entire flock passed before a shot was fired."

There would be flock upon flock, however, "in almost endless line, nearly on a level with the muzzle of our guns," as the hunters fired until their shotguns were too hot to load and they turned to pistols, while others threw clubs, "seldom, if ever, failing to bring down some of the passing flock."

In the nests rested the squabs, hardly able to fly, which were "ousted" from the nests. Some of them plummeted to the ground and burst like tomatoes.

Joining in the hunt, the writer estimated, were 100,000 hunters from all portions of the country. "Probably as many as a thousand were there on the same day with us, but scattered along through the woods."

On April 6, 1871, a townsman of River City looked up at the sky and wrote, "The air is full of them flying Southward. About a quarter section flew over our city last Friday morning. One has to rise early to see them."

Now, you can arise well before the dawn but you won't be able to see a passenger pigeon. Once our most numerous bird, "ectopistes migratorius" is extinct.

1871: Suckers

From the May 25, 1871, Wood County Reporter comes a perennial song of spring, with an antique flourish:

"Every Saturday, and we guess on other days many times, regardless of school, troops of boys adjourn to the dams at the Edwards' and Hurley's Mills, to engage in the sport of fishing for suckers.

"Judging from the quantities brought into town, the finny tribe must be fast becoming depopulated, and as a consequence the river made very low.

"Now boys," continued the editor jokingly, "it is wrong to catch so many fish as to impede the running of lumber.

"If you make the river so shallow by taking out the suckers that the lumber can't be got to market, your pa's can't buy johnnycake-timber and slyrick, nor play billiards, nor pay for the Reporter. So be good little boys, and let somebody else catch the suckers, or else fish for something that an editor can eat.

"Something," he continued, "that don't have little parcels of bones done up for family use. Get a bass or a pickerel and bring it to us and we'll tell you what we think of it."

1880: A Hand to Execute

—Found in an autograph book given to Georgiana Arpin (Buckley) by her brother, Daniel on May 9, 1880.—

Beauty is admired, talent adored, but virtue is a woman's crown. With it, the poor are rich; Without it, the rich are poor. It walks through life upright and never hires its head for high or low.

Your cousin,
Mary Arpin.

Georgiana! Thou has a heart to resolve
A head to contrive
And a hand to execute,
F. MacKinnon

Remember your friend:—
John G. Love

Georgiana:—
One day with life & ha
Is more than time enough
to find a world.
Your Cousin
Emma Dugas

It is not empty words
But actions from the heart,
That makes the path way beautiful
And forms life's better part.
Your coz,
Laura Byron

Un ami don du ciel, est le vrai bien du sage.
Francis Byron

If you would make a friend,
Be a friend.
Be not quick to take offense,
Let it pass.
Anger is a foe to sense
Let it pass. Your friend
J.A. Gaynor

Georgiana:
There is beauty in every living being. But the most beautiful of all the beauties is the mind if cultivated in the right direction.

Geo. Witter

Georgiana:—
Do not forget me when you're happy.
Save for me one little spot.
In the depths of your affections, to
Plant a sweet "forget me not."
Your coz,
Elmire J. Corriveau

Increase in virtue. Jas. Meehan, Jr.

Lovely, sweet and charming Georgie
Oh how beautiful and fair
Not excelled by any feature
Bright brown eyes and jet black hair.
Your new coz,
L.A.P.

When you are old and can not see,
Put on your specks and think of me,
From your sister,
Mary

1881: The Pursuit of Etiquette

The lead story of Sept. 8, 1881, remained the president, James Abram Garfield, who, after only four months in office, had been wounded by Charles J. Guiteau, "a disreputable politician," "an erratic lawyer and disappointed office seeker," and "a mentally unbalanced man who had unsuccessfully sought a federal appointment."

Two months after being shot in the back, the president was gravely ill. Reports on his health were telegraphed to Grand Rapids, sometimes several times a day.

Preparations were made to move Garfield to New Jersey, out of the Washington heat. A Sept. 5 report said, "The president passed a restless and somewhat uneasy day to-day, more from anticipation of his removal than from his physical condition. His first question on awakening this morning, was: 'Is the last day here?' "

Garfield died Sept. 19, 1881, at the age of 50, as a result of Guiteau's attack. The assassin was tried and hanged.

Though the Garfield tragedy dominated the wire, it also was noted that, in foreign affairs, the French invasion of North Africa was meeting strong resistance.

"From Morocco to Tunis the whole Mohammedan race is in a state of ferment," wrote the Reporter. "The Arabs are concentrating to defend Kairouan, the holy city."

In our own Southwest, a general uprising of the Apache nation was expected at any time.

Miscellaneous violence from many parts of the country seemed random or vindictive. Near Murfreesboro, Tenn., "Alderian Pitts, a wealthy farmer, was assassinated in his melon-patch, evidently because he had commenced a divorce suit."

As the Industrial Revolution progressed, pollution had become a serious problem. Hastings, Mich., schools were closed because impure water brought on an epidemic of diphtheria. Elsewhere, "A thick, yellow cloud enveloped Boston recently, to such a degree that many factories were compelled to close." And, "The banks of the Illinois river, all the way from Pekin to Peoria, are strewn with dead fish, and gangs of men are employed in burying them. The cause is believed to be the refuse from the glucose-works and distilleries of Peoria."

Partly as a result of dangerous health conditions, the death rate was high. New York suffered 42.8 deaths per thousand. Minneapolis 31.1, Milwaukee 28.9 and Beloit 21.6, compared to a 1977 rate for Wisconsin of 8.4.

Around home, the W.H. Cochran murder trial provided plenty of scandal. Having been moved from Grand Rapids to Neillsville because of local passions, the trial attracted a long list of spectators, which was published in both papers. Many were sympathetic to the man who, it was judged, had shot his wife's lover.

The weather continued to be dreary.

"If the clerk of the weather knew that all the logs had been run down," wrote the Tribune, "and that there is no lumber to run over the rapids, maybe he would let up on this continued rain."

Weather or not, school was scheduled to begin. "The average small boy looks askant at the closed windows of the schoolhouse," said the Tribune, "and with temperature at 100, respiration 24, and pulse 112, exclaims, 'Only one more week of life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.' "

Home could be oppressive too. In a short manual of social graces, it was suggested that "the hand is the proper medium for removing grape skins and fruit pits from the mouth to the plate, and the napkin should hide all use of the toothpick."

The president was dying but that was no reason the children of River City couldn't mind their manners.

Happy New Year, 1883

Two newspapers operating in Grand Rapids 100 years ago showed little holiday spirit.

First, Paul and Albert Fontaine's Wood County Reporter quarreled with an item printed in the Stevens Point "Pinery," which stated that an elderly couple had obtained a divorce. "Mr. Waterman claims to be 106 years old but few people here who know him believe it to be a fact. He is probably 75 or 80 years of age," disputed the local Reporter.

However, the editor of the Grand Rapids Tribune, probably E.B. or Arthur A. Brundage, responded hotly on Dec. 30. "If the astute scribbler for the REPORTER had inquired into the facts of Mr. Waterman's age, he would readily have discovered that the old family Bible records his birth as 'Jan. 1, 1776.'

"The statement of the REPORTER implies that Mr. W. don't know his own age—that he is almost an idiot. On the contrary, he is bright and keen and this slur by our nondescript neighbor is almost as brutal as his slandering of the dead.

"Bub," concluded the Tribune, "who is your next subject for slander and base insinuations?"

More cheerfully, the Reporter related a "good story" about a "certain young man of Centralia." It seems the young man at Christmas had a "royal time" and became "seriously intoxicated." The drunken youth put his horse in the barn of one "P. Dessaint" and fell upon some machinery in the process, cutting his head badly and rendering himself unconscious. He woke up in the night, wondered what had happened to his horse, and rushed to the residence of Marshal Carey to tell him two thugs had stolen the animal and had gone to a dance on the Four Mile Creek. The marshal and the drunk awakened Justice Lord and secured the proper papers to arrest the villains as well as a team to effect the procedure. The plaintiff and marshal "sailed out to the creek only to be disappointed." The Four Mile was "still as night."

In the morning, the supposed thieves were apprehended, but soon allowed to depart in peace, when witnesses claimed the plaintiff had been so "tight" he had forgotten where he'd left his rig.

In the last hours of 1882, the Reporter editor was filled to a large extent with good cheer.

"As the New Year approaches we are prompted to bid every subscriber to the REPORTER a happy and prosperous new year; To this entire community a brighter and more successful future; To the city fathers and their subordinates wisdom in the discharge of their duties, that at the close of another year we may see great progress in our city government, growth in business, and a larger population."

John N. Brundage, publisher and owner of the Tribune, stated on Dec. 30, that on New Year's Day he would turn over "the proprietorship of all the office material, good will and all accounts due" to his son, E.B. Brundage. "That he has earned the good will of our people and now enjoys it, is a source of gratification and pride to the undersigned; and trusting that he will merit and receive a liberal share of patronage from the public, wish our old-time friends and patrons a Happy and Prosperous New Year, and constant repetitions of the same throughout time and eternity."

The Reporter, however, brought the ebullience into perspective. In a dispute over taxes, John Brundage had appeared in court and had obtained a verdict in his favor.

Wrote his competitor: "The actions and testimony of Mr. B. while on the stand were supremely disgusting and evasive and a continued effort to avoid telling the facts which are all against him. It is a shame for the proprietor of the Tribune to try to avoid paying his share of the taxes, on mere technicalities."

Just another way of saying, "Happy New Year, 1883."

1900: False Gods

"It is indeed a grumpy, evil minded, misanthropic, individual who does not have some pleasant recollection of pleasurable anticipation at the mention of this great holiday that had become almost universal among civilized nations."

The editorialist responsible for that Yuletide opinion in the Dec. 22, 1900, Grand Rapids Tribune continued, "The miser with his hoard is not happy on that day. What cares he for the crowds of hungry children as they troop to the church on Christmas eve to spend another of the happiest evenings of their life. He has not children to come home to him and tell him of the splendor and magnificence of array of shimmering glass and blazing candles, and the merry peal of the Christmas chime only brings to his mind the expenditure of a certain amount of muscular exertion and a corresponding amount of clatter."

That issue of the weekly Tribune made mincemeat of the miserable miser, but courted the consumer. "Attention! Here are a few Christmas gifts which may be seen now in all grades and prices. Book Cases, Onyx Tables, Writing Desks, Morris Chairs, Fancy Rockers." Offered by M.A. Bogoger, "Furniture and Undertaking."

J.W. Natwick, "The Furniture Man," advertised rockers, pictures, tables, easy chairs and writing desks.

"Do not forget!" wrote Johnson & Hill's, "to call on us when doing your Christmas shopping. You will find the largest assortment of Fancy Goods, Toys, Dolls, Games, Doll Carriages, Sleds, etc. here at prices that cannot be duplicated." Centralia Hardware sold musical harmonophones, caroms, parlor games, procelain chafing dishes, silver and nickel-plated wires, cutlery, sleds, coasters, skates, ranges, coal stoves, sewing machines, cutters and bobsleighs.

On the East Side, the Boston Cheap Store listed dry goods, dress goods, ribbons, clothing, hats, caps, boots, shoes, Christmas toys, notions—all at "Prices down to the botton notch."

While shopping, the family might stop at Barnes' Candy Kitchen, to sample "a line of Christmas tree decorations and candies that equal anything to be found in the city."

"Muir, the Shoe Man," of course had shoes, and chamois-lined slippers for dad. H.H. Voss, at Wood County Drug, suggested that a Waterman fountain pen "makes a good Christmas present." Another "prescription" druggist, Sam Church, on the West Side, sold "holiday goods."

Mrs. J. Hamm's items were "useful as well as ornamental." She warned, "Don't wait until selections are broken." "Everything in the toy line," could be found at F.L. Steib & Co.

W. Gross, West Side grocer, said, "We will place on sale next week the largest stock we ever had of Christmas eatables and good things.' Among these were mixed candy at a nickel a pound, mixed nuts at 12 cents per pound and Mexican oranges priced at 25 cents a dozen.

The Tribune printed some suggestions about what to get that favorite dad or brother. For the den, "a gayly embroidered sofa cushion or an Italianate blanket in picturesque stripes." Perhaps a comfortable chair "for the man who stays home evenings." The new chair might even "induce one who goes out often to stay home and try it."

"Other picturesque Japanese masks, swords and bayonets . . . a wastebasket would not be amiss, and one of the new corkscrews with a horn top, silver trimmed, would be highly acceptable."

To service the Christmas rush, "it is to be noticed with regret that some of the pupils have been absent from school during the past week for the purpose of clerking in our local stores during the holidays, which ought never to be allowed."

One last gift suggestion was for grandpa, whose arms had got too short to hold the newspaper far enough away to read it. "A nice pair of gold spectacles will make a nice Christmas present. If you buy them of A.P. Hirzy, graduate optician, the owner can have them fitted free of charge after Christmas."

Many churches had Christmas trees, and one, the congregational, said, "Santa Claus will be on deck to interview the children."

According to the editorial writer earlier mentioned, there was "another class, who, while they mean all right, are trying their hardest to remove from the day its greatest pleasure for the little ones. They tell us that it is a shame to fool the child with stories of a beneficent being who makes annual visits to replenish their stock of toys and toothache producers."

"Truly there is somewhat of a sensation of blankness when the child discovers that he has been worshiping a false god . . . but in after life he will look back and admit that those were the happiest days of all."

1904: Shootout on Grand

Rudely awakened around midnight of Sept. 22, 1904, Nate Anderson found himself eyeball to eyeball with an armed posse. Outside the window stood 200 more men with guns, apparently prepared to fire at the first human being who showed any interest.

It was quite an opening for Anderson's new 26-room hotel on the West Side of Grand Rapids. A few doors away from his office, Anderson was informed, lurked a dangerous desperado, a cop-killer with a bounty on his head of $1,000.

The suspect, Peter Hanson, had arrived in this city on the late train, engaged a room at the hotel and to all appearances, had gone to bed.

On the same train with Hanson had been a former deputy sheriff who considered himself something of a detective.

When the sleuth viewed Hanson, it struck him that this was the man who had shot Sheriff Harris of St. Croix County. He even carried the accused murderer's picture, which he scrutinized as the train moved along. When the suspect got off and registered in the hotel, the detective woke up Wood County Sheriff Ebbe and told him the facts in the case. "The latter realized the gravity of the situation and hurriedly summoning those of our citizens who were awake, and gathering all the spare firearms that could be obtained," wrote the Tribune, "a stealthy advance was made on Anderson's hotel." Ascertaining that there was no earthly chance of escape, the sheriff went in and woke the hotel proprietor, who was ready to surrender on the spot.

Now came the time to wake the alleged desperado himself. The sheriff, as representative of the people and an officer of law and order, considered the honor his right, but instead, a certain Charley Norton, veteran of the Spanish American war, who carried a double-barreled shotgun, was selected for the task. With the crowd gathered around his rear, expecting Hanson to come out with a revolver in each fist and shooting, Charley rapped on the door.

In a moment, a sleep-drugged query came from within: was it train time?

Charley said it was.

The men listened apprehensively to the sounds from behind the door. From what they could tell, the man got up and turned on the gas. Then, to their astonishment, he turned off the light and climbed back into bed.

Charley banged on the door again. "Come out in the name of the law."

"Who wants me?"

"The sheriff of Wood County."

"Well, what's your name?"

The question floored Charley.

He was not that well acquainted with the sheriff and his name had slipped his mind. Only when some of the rear guard passed up the sheriff's name was the door opened.

As Hanson rubbed sleep from his eyes, he stared at Charley's double-barreled shotgun and with large, dark oaths insisted he had not killed a sheriff for some time, but that he might do so in short order, if his uninvited guests did not depart at once and let him go to sleep. Inside the room, he showed them letters from his wife and other papers that convinced the posse he was only a farmer from Kaukauna.

As the crowd reached the hall, a thunderous explosion rocked the hotel. Posse members leaped to attention, as outside, rifles cocked and each sentry hurried behind an available obstruction, "prepared to die like a man and a soldier."

When the smoke cleared, it became apparent that the fuss had been caused by the discharge of Charley Norton's shotgun as, thinking the worst was over, he attempted to lower the hammers.

By the time Anderson totaled the damages, he had reassessed his social obligations. While still willing to aid the law, he asserted the difficulties of running a hotel and keeping up the reputation of a quiet and homelike place.

By the time Anderson had charged old Charley Norton $4.50 to repair the hallway, another good and brave citizen came to realize "what a cold, unfeeling world we live in, and how little the general public appreciates our valorous deeds."

1909: The Sports Fan

"The Tomah high school foot ball team came to this city on Saturday and played a game with the high school foot ball team of this city and were beaten by a score of 17 to 0. It was a Grand Rapids game from start to finish and there was no time when the visitors stood any kind of a show of winning, or even getting a point.

"Our boys beat the visitors at every kind of a game they tried, and once one of the home team got around the end he was sure of a good gain before he could be stopped."

That's the entire story: no names, no statistics and no explanation of the scoring, written in October of 1909 by an anonymous Grand Rapids Tribune contributor.

The rival Grand Rapids Leader had little to add. "The Grand Rapids team outclassed the visitors, but not so much as to render the game uninteresting." After this first game, speculated the Leader, the team referred to not as "Red Raiders," but as "the locals," was expected to have "plenty to do" when they played Wausau and Stevens Point.

Unfortunately for the River City chauvinists, a "big and car(e)fully trained high school team" at Oshkosh defeated Grand Rapids, 17 to 6. "Berg" scored for Rapids on a 60-yard run and "Buff" Natwick kicked the point after touchdown. Apparently touchdowns were worth only five points then. Consoled the Tribune writer, "Luck played a considerable part in the victory of the Oshkosh boys."

As against Tomah, the Rapids team had an easy time with Waupaca, winning 24 to 0. "The boys report that the Waupaca team started out strong but that they lasted only a short time and that after that there was nothing to it."

In the type still known as a "close, hotly contested" home game, the locals surprised Stevens Point Normal 5 to 0. "Our boys," said the Tribune, "are to be congratulated on having beaten a team that was supposed to be their superiors in age, experience, strength and weight."

A "sensational" run by Grim Natwick and "good team work" received credit in the Tribune for the win. The Leader wrote, "The Normals are a big, husky lot of fellows, greatly outclassing our high school team in size and muscle, but that is the only advantage they had over the high school boys. They were not trained as our boys have been in team work and the other fine points of the game."

The return game at Point did not go so well. The Rapids teammates attributed their 9 to 0 loss to having been forced to leave four of their best players home, because they had been "crippled." Playing against Point were Schroeder, Carden, Hill, Baker, Getzloff, Arpin, Gross, M. Natwick, Berg, Smith and A. Natwick.

In what proved to be the last game of the season, at home against Wausau, a controversial victory provided the opposition with the excuses.

"There seemed to be some difficulty in getting the game started," wrote the Tribune, "there being disposition on the part of all hands to 'chew the rag' more than was absolutely necessary for the amusement of the spectators," who included a sizeable crowd from Wausau.

"From the loud protests of the Wausau boys before the game, one was led to believe that they came down here expecting to win," reported the Leader. "They protested so strongly against Smith's playing in the game that he was finally withdrawn and a substitute put into his place.

Then the fun commenced," continued the Leader, "or rather the slaughter, because the Wausau boys were terribly outclassed by the locals."

Both newspapers, however, opined that a reception held in the high school gymnasium after the game caused the unpleasant gridiron experience to be forgotten.

It was not to be, however, as demonstrated in the following week's Tribune reprint from the Wausau Record-Herald.

"The treatment accorded visiting teams by the Grand Rapids crowd, which attends the games and the effort this year to play a professional athlete on the team [Smith], were not conductive to cordial relations which ought to prevail."

A Merrill paper said their Rapids game would not take place because of the "professional athlete."

The Tribune responded forcefully, if cruelly. "It may be a trifle discouraging to practice around home until you get so that you imagine you are invincible and then come down here and be cleaned up with such ease that it is evident that you never understood the first principles of football."


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1909: Midnight Tragedy

"Help me. Help me!"

Although the cry had been answered hours ago, Esme Dolan lay uncomforted on her mother's couch. She would not feel secure for a long time, if ever again.

"Don't leave me, Vi," she begged of her friend and neighbor, Viola Palmer.

"Her hair was full of weeds," Vi said of 16-year-old Esme. "She'd gone down under the water. When she was being raised, someone had hold of her ankle. She felt her shoe go off when he lost his grip."

Her watch over the troubled friend lasted until 4 a.m., said Miss Palmer.

"She kept calling and calling their names. It was a long time before she could sleep. I kept pulling weeds out of her hair."

Carroll Rector and Will Sweet were, like Esme, scared, wet and sometimes hysterical, but alive and uninjured. Von Holliday, a mechanic and driver of the boat, had been sent to Riverview Hospital.

Ralph Anderson, 18, son of H.F. Anderson of the Anderson Carriage Works, had tried to save his sister, they said. His body lodged in the rocks of the rapids below the dam. Bessie Anderson, 16, a student at the training school, landed near the ice breaker by the bridge. Her friend, May Fors, 16, also a student at the training school, reposed in her own death bed nearby. Ruth Bogoger, 17, had been found first, near Bodette's shoe shop, drowned, they said. Her body had not been disfigured, or injured in any major way.

Later, one son and three daughters lay in their coffins, together in the Methodist church, as 2,000 mourners walked by, far too many to hear the Rev. Evans' sermon "extolling the virtues of the young people."

A long procession of horse-drawn carriages followed the hearses to Forest Hill Cemetery. Some of the family and friends went to the freshly dug graves in the Fors lot, an inviolate triangle. In one row, Jennie May, Ralph and Bessie. Ten feet before them, Ruth.

The Grand Rapids Tribune of June 2, 1909, said there probably never was a sadder day in the history of their city.

Tragedy had been announced in nightmare, as at midnight on May 25, hundreds of residents were called from their beds by fire alarms. They gathered on the side of the Wisconsin River in front of the Arpin house, where the city's East Side swimming pool was later built, and on the bridge, and near the Consolidated office building. Soon, in the darkness and confusion, rumors became truth.

Eight young people had decided to go for a boat ride. The band concert was over and they would have what they called a "marshmallow party." They went out on the lake above the 1904 dam in Ralph Anderson's new gasoline launch, "The Swan." After an enjoyable hour or two floating upriver, they returned toward the landing above the dam on the east side at about 11 p.m. The night was dark, and having no lights aboard, they got slightly off course. It was too late when they realized they were near the dam and that the water was running swiftly.

Apparently unknown to the boaters, one of the gates had been broken by the force of the water two days previous. When their condition became apparent, the boat was turned away, but the motor was inadequate to bring the passengers to safety. "We are going through the dam," called Ralph Anderson to the girls, in what may have been his last words. "Keep cool and cling to the boat for your lives and we will be able to save you."

"This was the first I realized that there was any danger," said Esme Dolan, as reported by the Wisconsin Valley Leader, in the extra edition of May 26. "We almost immediately entered the open gate and some terrible jar threw us all onto the bottom of the boat.

"Ralph Anderson was clinging to me at the time, but I never saw him after we passed through," said Esme. "The boat turned over but righted itself again. When we finally lodged on the rock from which we were taken, there were only four of us clinging to the boat, and I never could have maintained my position there, had it not been for Von Holliday, who held me partly out of the water."

The four lucky ones were rescued by the heroics of Kirk Muir and James Mason, who had gone out in a skiff that soon swamped and had gone out again in a boat they'd borrowed from Arpin's barn and launched near the dam.

"Every year our beautiful, but treacherous river takes its toll of death," wrote the Leader, "principally among the young people of the city but no misfortune seems to overcome its fascination for long."

1912: Murder

Oct. 1, 1912 was special for 7-year-old Edward Beardsley and his brother Roy, 9. It was the day their father kept his promise. On the way home from his east side Grand Rapids grocery, Grant Beardsley stopped the horse and wagon long enough to take the boys into the Daly drug store and buy them a football.

At home, while the boys waited for their father to put the horse in the barn, they heard a popping noise and assumed their dad had blown up the football, perhaps too far. Instead, the 48-year-old Beardsley stumbled into the house and muttered to his wife, "Maggie, I'm shot."

"Mother tried to get us to go after Dr. Looze," said Edward, in 1982, "but we were too scared."

After being called by the police, Viola Palmer, a Beardsley employee and family friend, spoke with Beardsley's mother-in-law, Mrs. Hamm. "Yes, Vi, he's in the hospital. Can you come over to the house? We can't do a thing with Gertrude. She won't take off her new shoes until Daddy sees them."

Daddy would never see the shoes, nor would he again see Gertrude, daughter Margaret, son Harold or the other two boys. He died early on the morning of Oct. 2.

The day of the murder had been a busy Tuesday. Beardsley was moving his store into the old Barnes Candy Kitchen building near the Witter Hotel. The much larger building also had a safe, left behind by Mr. Barnes. Because of that safe, Beardsley abandoned his usual custom of taking the late receipts home. As he left with the boys, he called his last words to Miss Palmer.

"Good night Vi. See you tomorrow."

Beardsley dropped the children at the house and took the horse to the barn. There, he noticed the cow protruding from her stall. "Bossie, get in there where you belong."

As Beardsley removed the bridle from the horse, a man emerged from the cow stall and ordered, "Hold up your hands." Beardsley turned. The man fired a pistol into his back and ran off.

Beardsley saw enough to describe a short, thick-set assailant who wore a white handkerchief on the lower part of his face and a soft hat pulled over his eyes. It didn't take long for District Attorney Charles E. Briere and Undersheriff Julian T. Welch to unmask the inept villain.

The suspect was Mortimer Wilson, a former employee of Beardsley's, who had been earlier dismissed after cash was found missing. Wilson had been "out west" but had returned to marry his girlfriend and he needed some cash.

After the crime, Wilson was arrested at a card party and searched. A knotted handkerchief and a .32 caliber revolver with one shell fired were found. Wilson confessed when confronted with a pocketbook, postcard and keys found in Beardsley's privy, Miss Palmer said.

The wounding of Beardsley, a likeable and civic-minded citizen, caused enough concern that townspeople might lynch the suspect that Sheriff Schmidt hustled Wilson to Wausau.

Only a week after the crime, Wilson pleaded guilty at the Stevens Point circuit court of Judge Park to the charge of first-degree murder and consequently was sentenced to life imprisonment at Waupun State Prison. At the trial Wilson showed no emotion except when told he would not be able to see his father before he went to prison. He said he didn't know what put the foolish idea of the robbery into his head.

After the death of her husband, Mrs. Beardsley continued to operate the grocery until 1941 when her five children became old enough to take care of themselves.

Eleven years after his confinement, Wilson received, on April 7, 1923, a governor's conditional pardon, which was made absolute in 1938.

Miss Palmer said Mrs. Beardsley was asked to sign a release for Wilson, to which she agreed, causing a lawyer to remark, "Mrs. Beardsley, you are a saint."

"Remember," she answered, "I have three sons and two daughters. God knows what their temptations might be."

1920: Rush Water

We're from Rush Water,
Couldn't be prouder.
Can't hear us now?
We'll yell a little louder.

Yes, there was a chance, however slim, that the cheerleaders from the burg between Port Edwards and Biron would be invoking oral gymnastics for their "Rush Water Red Raiders."

That was in 1920, when "Grand Rapids" decided to change its name.

Long confused with a much larger river city in western lower Michigan, also named Grand Rapids—not to mention Grand Rapids in Manitoba, Minnesota, Ohio and North Dakota (population 3)—the Wisconsin town received 20 letters a day meant for Michigan. The same number was misdirected from the Michigan city to the Wisconsin town.

When the U.S. Post Office agreed to a name change in January 1920, the search—and debate—for a new name began.

In retrospect, one can look over the list published in the Grand Rapids Daily Leader and ask, "Why 'Rapids Grand' or 'Great Rapids' or 'The Rapids'?"

Because these names have retained the original "Grand Rapids" meaning.

But, why not? "Rapids Grand" is not an English construction and is awkward. "Great Rapids"? Too big!

"The Rapids" was too loose and informal. Besides, there are thousands of "rapids." The nickname still is in common usage, to distinguish us from neighbors upstream in "The Point."

Why "Ahdawagham"? Because it is the Indian word said to name the rapids. But, it has too many "h" letters and ends in a sound that reminds us of wet cardboard. It also is much too hard to spell, although it still titles the Lincoln High School yearbook.

Why "Consolidated City," "Power Rapids" and "Power City"?

Because Consolidated Papers, Inc. has the power. But the fealty was too blatant.

Why "Wisconsin City"? Because it is a city in the middle of Wisconsin, on the Wisconsin River. But, such an honorific should be reserved for the capital or biggest city.

Why "Grandalia" or Cenrapids"?

Because that's what you get when you cross Grand Rapids and her old sister city, Centralia (merged in 1900).

Why not? "Cenrapids" sounds terrible. "Grandalia," however, has a grandiloquent and melodic air.

"Grandalia" may be going a bit far, though.

It was better than "Riverdale" or "Riverside." These cosmopolitan cognomens belong in places like southern California and suburbia anywhere. In fact, an atlas lists 12 Riverdales and 19 Riversides in North America.

Why "Rapidson"?

Because the daughters of Rapids could imagine a tale of horror starring "The Son of Rapids" or "the Critter from the Black Water."

"Rush Water" and "Rock Rapids" were colorful and descriptive, but sounded too wet and too rocky. "Badger" was an afterthought. Fortunately, it remained so.

"Witter" would have honored several leading citizens. It was the only family name suggested in the Daily Leader.

The other choices show that the Grand Rapids of 1920 still was a river city, with its sensibilities turned toward the rapids.

Had anyone listened to Grand Rapids Tribune Editor Jack Brundage back in 1858, the final choice would have been made simply, and much earlier.

Why "Wisconsin Rapids"?

"To be sure," wrote Brundage, "we have the greatest rapids in the country; yet, there is no reason why they should be dubbed 'Grand.' We would humbly support the propriety of adopting the title, 'Wisconsin Rapids.' With this name, everyone would at once know that our location was in the state of Wisconsin, on the Wisconsin River, and that knowledge alone would satisfy them that our place was no western balloon town."

The same reasoning likely prevailed in 1920.

As the 1981 community known as Wisconsin Rapids drifts from its riverbank moorings, the contemporary book of names may be expanded.

Why "Cement City" or "Asphalt Rapids?"

For the strip of concrete and plastic that stretches past Plainview toward Des Plaines.

"We're from Grand Mall," cry the cheerleaders, but what the heck, so is everybody.

1929: 43 Below

If it is the prerogative of the wet-behind-the-ears prognosticators to exaggerate each ebb of the silver tide, it is the historian's penchant to put things into perspective.

The Daily Tribune has kept a record of the daily high and low temperatures since 1926.

The coldest recorded low was minus 43, on Feb. 19, 1929. The year the stock market plunged, so did temperatures. From Daily Tribune files, it seems 1929 was as wintry as any year. In January, 27 days zero or below were counted. The February toll was 16.

The year had begun with "snow, snow, snow and then just a little more snow." On Jan. 7, 1929, "Boreas and his blizzard squadrons failed even to make a dent in Wood county's line of defense, when the severest storm of the winter struck savagely Saturday morning." When the storm passed through, the mercury dropped from 41 to minus 21, a 62-degree range in temperature.

The Jan. 11, 1929, paper brought news of another blizzard and 18 inches of snow in a week. Drifts were reported four and five feet high in places. "The traffic situation in central Wisconsin was severely crippled today."

The description sounded familiar: "Backed by howling winds, a blizzard was sweeping over Wisconsin today to block roads and cripple traffic in many sections just recovering from the storm of last weekend."

As in the typical winter cycle, snow was followed by subzero temperatures. On Jan. 13, 1929, Rapids was the coldest spot in the state at minus 34. However, "Last night's record cold spell was probably not as noticeable as that of Saturday night because the chill blasts of wind had subsided considerably." In other words, the chill factor was down.

"Frosted ears and noses were not unusual Saturday night and yesterday, while one or two persons suffered from frozen feet," continued the report.

Another "blizzard" passed through on Jan. 22, 1929, "Wood County felt the full force of the gale. Six and eight foot snow drifts held automobiles on the highways in a vice like grip and the occupants were forced to abandon them and seek shelter in nearby farmhouses."

In this case, the temperature "plummeted" from 30 degrees to a minus 14, with seven inches of snow. In a couple of days, the roads were plowed, life went back to normal and the cycle was complete. This time, normal wasn't to last long, as a second blizzard hit on Jan. 25, 1929, leaving the city "nearly isolated" by snowdrifts. According to the report, 27 inches of snow had fallen in eight days. Plows waited for the wind to subside and went out again.

After the second wave, the state traffic tie-up was called the "worst in many years." Roads in the upper three-fourths of the state were entirely blocked. Ten trains stalled on their tracks.

Influenced by wintry difficulties, the county invested in a 60-horsepower caterpillar tractor on Feb. 2, 1929, to supplement three other tractors and several plow-equipped trucks.

On Feb. 18, 1929, the state was "again in icy clutch of sub-zero wave," following 4½ inches of snow. Two days later: "The year's cold record of January 13 when the mercury descended to a point 34 degrees below zero was shattered, shorn, and turned inside out when Boreas dominated sometime early this morning and hung up a new low record of 43 below zero, probably the coldest in the nation."

The extreme cold seemed the worst for the "widows and children" and for those households in which the wage-earner was sick or disabled, those "with no reserve of money and very little remaining of the coal supply purchased last fall for winter consumption; with scant underwear for the tots and shoes and overshoes worn out by trampling in the deep snow." Because of "the severity and length of the winter," emergency relief was sought.

Fortunately, winter was nearly over. The last day of February 1929 brought some more bad news. "Mild weather brings thaws, causes floods," read the headline.

Good weather, like good news, isn't much news at all.

It isn't the most promising beginning for a romance.

You go to pick her up for your first date—she's just out of the bathtub and the house is on fire. There is nothing to do but watch the floor collapse and the beds fall into the basement.

1931: The Standard Oil Fire

That's how Clem Rumble remembers the "conflagration" that is believed to be Wisconsin Rapids' worst modern fire, in April 1931.

Despite the trauma, Rumble and the lady, Dorothy Nash, were married six years later. "Ours was the last house to go," said Mrs. Rumble. "My mother and I were the only ones home. My dad was helping Tomcsyks carry out furniture. He came back and our house was on fire. A big ball of fire lit on the edge of the roof. It only took 20 minutes for the house to burn. We got a few things out, and people were stealing them out of our car.

"Really you were in shock," Mrs. Rumble recounted. "My mother, we thought we were going to lose her. She had just finished wallpapering; now everything was gone."

Dorothy was 20 at the time. Her brother, Raymond Nash, was 25.

"After dinner, I left the house and went down to the main fire," he said. "When I drove home, my house was on fire. All that was left was the chimney."

The Nash house was one of the many casualties. The Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune of April 13, 1931 estimated more than $100,000 in losses the day before. "Fire believed to have started about noon yesterday at a hoboes' camp back of the old E.W. Ellis Lumber company was whipped by a strong southeast gale across the west side of Wisconsin Rapids along the Milwaukee road railroad tracks, consuming 500 barrels of oil and a dozen or more warehouses and residences," the account said.

The "roaring inferno" consumed the house of Ellen Sabetta's grandfather, William Prebbanow. "I lived at 11th and High," she said. "When the alarm went off, my father told my mother, 'You take this child and get out of town.'

"My mother took me, the family Bible and my father's new suit," said Sabetta. "My father ended up at his own father's house, carrying furniture out."

Clarence Lukaszewski helped to save his neighbor's rented house, when the renter "just said to hell with it and loaded up their equipment and took off."

"Debris was sailing through the air like a comet," said Lukaszewski, who, along with his brother, stood on the roof kicking off incendiary material. When his own home was safe, Lukaszewski went to Albert Tomcsyk's to help move out furniture, until the ceiling fell in.

Fire departments from the surrounding communities were dispatched to the scene, but efforts of some were futile, such as the Marshfield squad, whose hoses would not fit west side hydrants. "Marshfield couldn't do anything," said Everett Lambert. "Some guys at the Huffman Publishing Company got on the roof watching for sparks. It was the same at Ahdawagam."

Like young local boys, others were attracted, according to the Daily Tribune account. "Wisconsin Rapids was thronged last evening by hundreds of motorists from miles around who came to see devastation wrought by the red demon. Restaurants, soft drink parlors and confectionaries, apparently aided by the report that river water turned into the mains was not fit to drink, did a rushing business."

The excitement led to some tall tales.

"If all the rumors current during and immediately after the fire were true," wrote the Daily Tribune, "several local firemen would have succumbed battling the flames, two women and one child would have been killed by automobiles, and several other tragedies would have occurred."

It wasn't entirely rumor. One elderly man died from a heart attack when he opened his front door to see the house across the street in flames.

Destroyed were the old Ellis Lumber company, owned by Standard Oil and used for storing oil and grease; the Shell warehouse; the L.E. Jensen warehouse; the Frank Garber warehouse; various storage buildings of smaller dimensions; and the houses of J.W. Lemley, 850 Grand Ave.; Mrs. T.O. Riley, 141 8th Ave. S.; Albert Tomczyk,

520 7th Ave., N.; William Prebbanow, 921 7th Ave. S.; and J.W. Nash, 511 Fremont St.

A final casualty is recalled by Gerald Ristow. *You're 18 years old, on the porch roof wetting wooden shingles with a hose, wood which becomes awfully slippery when it's wet. Your feet go out from under you and you fall from the roof, landing the full length of your body. You don't have any broken bones, but, as you say, "that kind of cooled me off."*

1929: Putting out the Lights

The stock-market "crashes" of Oct. 24 and Oct. 29 are considered the start of the "Great Depression." Within weeks, thousands became unemployed. In the next four years, about 100,000 were laid off each week, until 20 million were unemployed.

Writers in 1929 could appreciate the drama of the Wall Street actions, but could not foresee the ominous results. The Oct. 30 story began characteristically: "a note of optimism was heard today amid the echoes of a Wall Street crash in which a tidal wave of 16,410,030 shares overwhelmed the stock market, breaking all records. But before a series of huge buying orders, flung into the market during the last 15 minutes of trading, had dammed the flow, the third and biggest selling wave had hit the market within a week."

The market upheaval wiped out speculators and cut prices nearly in half. Yet, a New York banker predicted, "Prudent investors are now buying stocks in huge quantities and will profit handsomely when this hysteria is over."

The official attitude of President Herbert Hoover's administration remained that American business need expect no adverse results from the collapse of stock-exchange prices. Purchasing power and demand for commodities was high; employment, on the increase; production, booming; and prices of commodities, consistent.

The Wisconsin Rapids Daily Tribune agreed: "Furthermore we do not believe that the decline in securities will in any way affect either the banks here, in Wood county and adjacent counties, the state of Wisconsin or those throughout the United States. If there were any bank failures it would be due to the 'wolf' cries of the demagogues in American public life so amply represented in the halls of congress by the senator from Iowa.

"As to Wisconsin Rapids and neighboring banks within the circulation radius of The Tribune, we have the utmost confidence in their security and integrity, in their management and their affairs to the extent that as a newspaper we would recommend unqualifiedly that anyone with surplus funds either deposit their funds in these banking institutions or seek the advice of their well qualified and honest officers.

"The stock market operations of recent days and weeks should offer ample evidence of the precariousness of investing blindly by the man or woman who knows very little about such things. As far as we are concerned we believe that the confidence of local people in their own neighbors and banks will not be in the slightest disturbed by the ridiculous suggestions of political opportunists who seize on any condition to try and use it as a way and means of making front pages and gain notoriety and advertising for themselves.

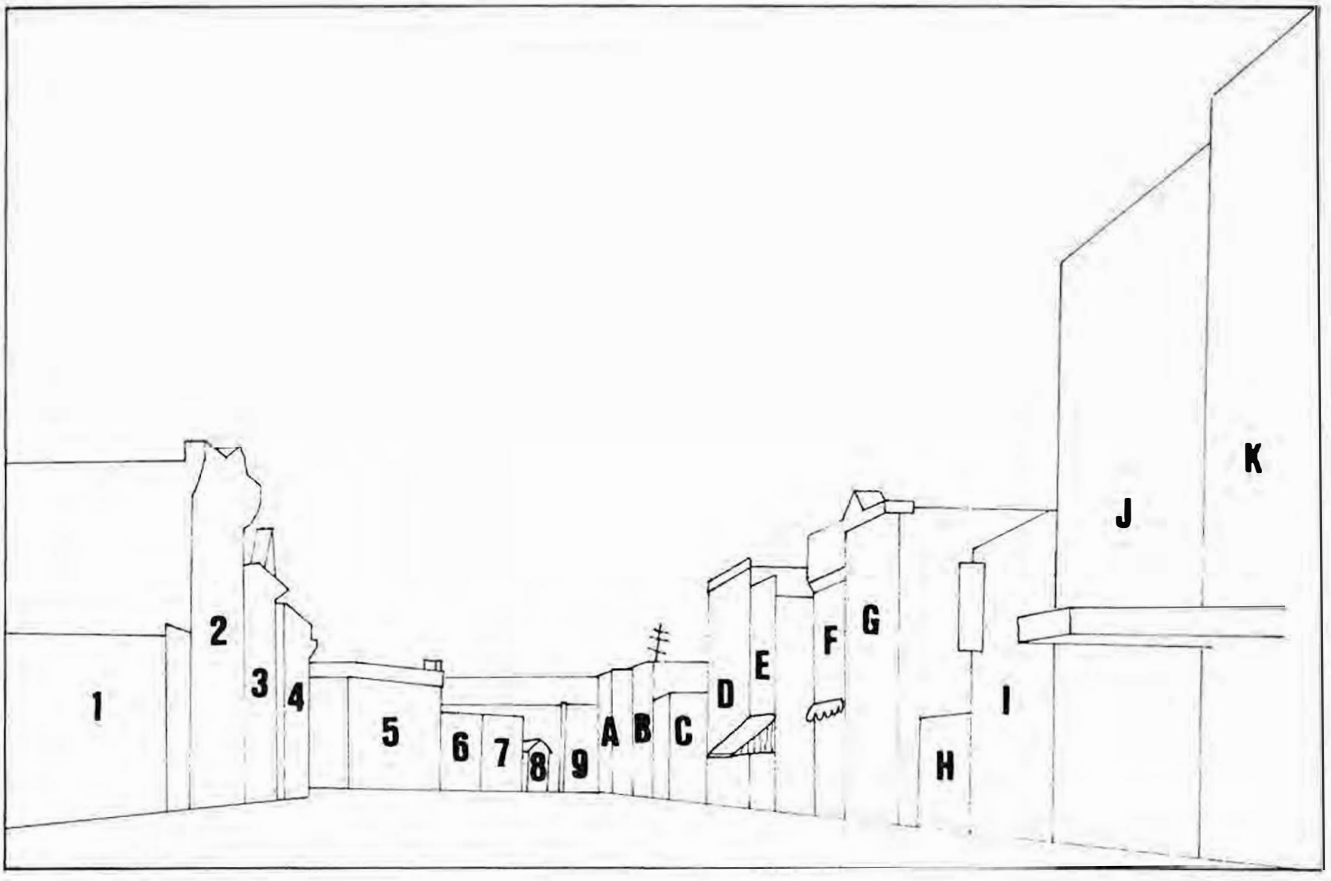
"This editorial," the Tribune felt compelled to add, "is not suggested or even inspired by local banking interest and appears without their knowledge."

Like the newspaper editorialists, the rest of the nation did not for the most part realize that an era of relative prosperity had just ended. That an economic depression had been triggered was far from the mind of another writer in the Oct. 30, 1929, Tribune. Virginia Whittlesey, "Wisconsin Rapids' first girl student flyer," wrote, in an essay, "Learning to Fly," that "the stars of heaven were subdued by this lord of the night [the moon] but not so the stars of earth. Breaking from the charm I looked down and saw millions of bright gems. Practically speaking they were Wisconsin Rapids, Port Edwards and Nekoosa.

"Port Edwards was especially beautiful for through the center of the cluster ran a double string of diamonds made by the double row of large white globed street lights. The giant paper mill hung as a mass of tiny brilliants at the end of the string."

The novice aviatrix could not know, the journalists did not know and President Hoover would not know that in the ensuing months, many of the twinkling lights of America would disappear, like diamonds popping off Mrs. Vanderbilt's necklace.


BLUE RIBBON
BEER
STATION
SHOP
GOOD / HAVE IT
GAS
NELL'S
REILAND LEWIS
Brauer
HOTEL
WITTER
CAFE



1934: The East Side

(from a 1981 painting by Tim Burt)

1. Nels P. Seim, tailor, 212 1st St. N.
2. Joe Staub's Electric Shop and Motor Winding Works, 210 1st St. N.
3. Mrs. J. Hamm building housing the Rapids Bargain Store, 180 1st St. N. and Edward A. Schmidt's Tin Shop, 150 1st St. N.
4. "Flatiron Building" built as First National Bank—in 1934, Building and Loan Assoc., 130 1st St. N.
5. Bob Brauer's Clothing Store, 111 2nd St. S.
6. Reiland Meat Market, 131 2nd St. S.
7. Lewis Hardware Co. building—in 1933 Ragan's Used Furniture, 141 2nd St. S.
8. A.A. Forstner Barber Shop, 151 2nd St. S.
9. H.F. Loock Grocery, 161 2nd St. S. Above and behind is the wall of the Wood County National Bank.

A. Daly Drug and Jewelry Co., 112 2nd St. S.
B. Geoghan's Confectionary Store, 121 2nd St. N. and Ed Bassett Electric Co., 131 2nd St. N.
C. Arndt's Confectionary, 135 1st St. N. and Green Kassel Restaurant, 141 1st St. N.
D. J.R. Ragan's Furniture Store, 161 1st St. N.
E. J.M. Klun's Studio (photographic), 173 1st St. N.
F. Herschleb's Bakery, 211 1st St. No.
G. Beardsley's Grocery, 221 1st St. N.
H. Bruderli Shoe Repair Shop, 225 1st St. N.
I. The Coffee Cup (sign says "Hartel's"), 233 1st St. N.
J. The Hotel Witter (Honan barber shop), 241 1st St. N.
K. The Hotel Witter, 243 1st St. N.

1942: Wartime Honeymoon

At the time, it seemed a solution. If a girl had no nylon or silk stockings because there was no nylon or silk, she asked a friend with a can of paint to spray some on her. Such mistresses of invention were pictured in a 1942 Daily Tribune.

These were war years and painted women were just another way of making a lifestyle do what it had done, without the means.

As some women did without nylons, so Americans did without their usual portion of coffee, sugar, fuel oil, gasoline and wallpaper. Items such as safety razors were pulled from the market. Factories that had produced razors began manufacturing knives and bayonets.

The speed limit statewide had been set at 35 mph in order to save fuel. Drivers were warned that if they exceeded that level, one of their five alloted tires of remanufactured rubber might disintegrate.

Domestic adjustments such as these brought World War II home to Americans. Many were glad to make some sacrifice for the war effort and for the soldiers they had sent overseas. Others were prodded by such intimidations as this newspaper ad for a scrap drive: "Your neglect will cost some brave boy's life!"

It had begun, for the United States, on Dec. 7, 1941, when the Japanese bombed the U.S. naval base at Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, in a surprise attack. Italy and Germany at once declared war against the United States, as part of a former agreement with Japan. Together, they were called the "Axis."

Within a month, Wake Island and Guam were taken by the Japanese and the Phillippines, four months later. U.S. naval power in the Pacific had been all but crushed.

However, with the entry of this country, its immense industrial power converted to wartime production, the Axis powers began to lose the offensive to the "Allies." On Nov. 8, 1942, an English and American force invaded North Africa, occupied by the Nazis under Gen. Rommel. Gen. Dwight D. Eisenhower led the Allies.

At the same time, "Yanks" advanced in the Pacific on Guadalcanal. The Russians stalled the German advance at Stalingrad and the fortunes of war began to turn against the Axis.

Back in Wisconsin, readers in November 1942 could escape the real battlefields to the figurative conflict of another football season. Sports were good news for some teams that often amounted to bad news. Wisconsin beat Ohio State, with the able assistance of halfback Elroy "Crazylegs" Hirsch, so fast his shadow couldn't catch up, and went on to an 8-1-1 record.

Packer fans that year cheered the combination of "Isbell to Hutson." In the St. Louis game, the quarterback to end teamed for five touchdown passes.

The favorite song of 1942 was "Praise the Lord and Pass the Ammunition," according to a Daily Tribune editorial. To provide some of the vehicles for that ammunition, shipyards such as that at Manitowoc shifted into war production cycles. One of their products was the submarine.

Welders were among the artisans needed to construct the warships. One welder, who had failed in his attempt to enlist in the military, came down from Appleton, applied and was hired. The 24-year-old son of a Seymour farmer was my father, Donald A. Engel.

Shortly after that, he married my mother, Arline "Sally" Sylvester. Their 44-year romance is the reason I am writing today. Nov. 17 marks the 40th anniversary of their marriage.

They met at a church party for young people, mostly farm kids from around Seymour. Some of those present wanted to play pingpong. Since there were no pingpong balls in evidence, someone had to go shopping. It turned out to be Don and Sally. To that mission I owe my existence.

The first date was New Year's Eve and they drove to the big city of Appleton, stayed out half the night and got home at a time just now becoming public.

The romance? From the pictures, I gather it included lots of goofing around, roller skating, swimming, and the race car. Built by Don and his brothers from spare parts, wood and cloth, it ran far enough to get to the fairground at least.

One lovers' quarrel might be mentioned. It seems Don took off one day without telling Sally. The stunt-car team of Flash Williams needed a driver for a Midwestern tour. When Don got back, his reception may have been rather more cool than he had hoped.

The wedding was on a wartime Tuesday at Seymour Evangelical Church. The only negative hitch was that Don's brother, Roy, didn't get back from his Navy physical in time for the wedding and a substitute brother had to be called forth.

There was a short wartime honeymoon. Married on Tuesday, back to work on the following

Monday after a weekend at Milwaukee's Plankinton Hotel and liberal feeding of the ducks in Juneau Park.

For the newlyweds, living in Manitowoc was exciting. So many workers had been called in from all over the country. Big parties were held at launchings of new ships. He joined the State Guard. She wrapped bandages for the Red Cross.

As the end of the war became imminent, the Engels moved to what seemed like the Frontier, Wisconsin Rapids. Their first son was born almost on V.J. Day.

Nearly everything in Wisconsin Rapids turned out the way it was supposed to. Don got a good job. They built a house, raised four kids, made an outstanding number of good friends and were exemplary citizens of their community.

Even those of a generation who lost their war and who will not celebrate a 40th anniversary and whose lives did not turn out the way they figured may pause to honor the success of a marriage. To parents to whom we owe our peculiar physical and mental character: our height or lack of it; our intelligence or ineptitude; our principles and pride; our nose or excess of it, we offer congratulations.

1930-1980: Decades

The '30s: Sharing the work

Making the depression easier to bear locally was a "share the work" schedule at the Consolidated mill, in which workers (at 43 cents per hour in 1935) took four six-hour shifts in a day rather than three eight-hour shifts, providing more jobs than would otherwise be possible in a period of lowered production.

To cope with hard times, Presidents Hoover and Roosevelt considered new and unusual measures. Rapids mayor George W. Mead followed suit, calling for public and private funds to provide work for the unemployed.

Under Mead's direction, workers produced hardwood that sold for $1.25 per cord. This was the same price demanded for a pair of silk stockings from Johnson & Hill.

The minimum wage at Mead's Consolidated Water Power and Paper Co. mill in 1932 was 35 cents per hour.

Despite a troubled marketplace, Consolidated in 1935 introduced the first coated paper manufactured in a single, high-speed operation—a move that would establish the firm's marketing identity.

In 1932, the second "new" Lincoln High School was built, later to be converted to East Junior High.

Much of the decade's educational news concerned controversies between the school board and superintendent Julius Winden. It was his forced resignation in 1932 that resulted in the recall of several board members.

Winden was reinstated, but four years later resigned for good, after refusing to renew the contracts of 16 teachers who had affiliated with the A.F. of L.

In 1932, a 60-band state high school tournament was hosted by Wisconsin Rapids, whose band placed third.

Prohibition ended in 1933. Those who remember celebrating at the old armory will probably remember the 1938 fire that destroyed it.

The 1930 population of Wisconsin Rapids was 8,726. By 1940, it had grown to 11,416.

The '40s: Story of a War

Following the 1941 attack by the Japanese on Pearl Harbor, the United States joined the war against Japan and Germany, launching a counteroffensive in the Pacific and joining the Allies in an invasion of North Africa in 1942.

At home, Wisconsin Rapids factories geared to wartime production. Consolidated developed a plastics division in 1943 for fabrication of aircraft materials. Harvard Clothing produced 50,000 army coats in the first half of 1942. Prentis-Wabers, now named Preway, saw employment reach an all-time high due to government orders.

"Hundreds join armed forces while those on home front enlist for civilian service," wrote the Daily Tribune. "South Wood County shoulders its share of the burden and falls into step." Part of the burden was 50 servicemen listed as killed in action.

A "community war chest," scrap-metal collections, Red Cross volunteers, a serviceman's center, an Army Air Force technical school at the Tri-City Airport and a P.O.W. camp for German prisoners, war bonds, the state guard, victory gardens, rationing of such items as rubber, sugar, petroleum and coffee: the war's influence was pervasive.

The war's end was greeted by an eager resumption of domesticity. Returning vets, some housed in barracks on 17th Avenue, munched on Nick Engel's "presalted celery" and laid the foundation for the coming "baby boom." That explosion of post-war rug rats led to a corresponding grade school building boom in the later '40s. Howe, St. Mary's, Nekoosa public, Immanuel Lutheran and Children's Choice were some of the results.

To entertain the youngsters were a new zoo, the Wisconsin Rapids White Sox professional baseball team and the 1949 Cranboree, "sure to become an annual affair." Given away that year were 10,000 slices of cranberry pie.

Equally entertaining was the 1949 story of the year, the "Rudolph Lion." More than a few sober folks saw it. They said it was really a lion. It wasn't long before they saw a lion out near Kellner too.

The '50s: Hula Hoops and bomb shelters

Wisconsin Rapids' population grew from 11,416 to 13,496 in the decade from 1940 to 1950. Later known as "happy days," this period was characterized by rock 'n roll 'n rockets, satellites,

computers, polio shots, goiter pills, tranquilizers, Ike, 3-D, Hula Hoops, sack dresses, $5,000 ranch houses, picture windows, "American Bandstand," "I Love Lucy," convertibles, faith, hope, charity, and if we can believe our nostalgia, great weather.

The decade, however, also knew the cold War, fear of Communism, McCarthy and underground bomb shelters. It was in 1950 that President Harry S. Truman ordered U.S. troops to South Korea, in a police action that lasted until 1953.

1951 brought a state basketball championship to Wisconsin Rapids. The same year, the Hotel Mead, one of the first "motorized" hotels, was built.

Some 80,000 watched the Cranboree parade of 1954. If they waited impatiently for the bridge to be open to traffic, the following year they could go around, by way of the new Jackson Street bridge.

In time for the Wood County centennial of 1956, the new courthouse was built. In 1959, school boards were still catching up on the baby boom. Mead School had been built and then Woodside and Pitsch schools. The decade ended with a new Daily Tribune/WFHR radio building that added its character to the west river bank.

Perhaps the most significant harbinger of the change was the 1954 contruction of the Save More Supermarket on 8th Street South, a move that included plans for an additional 22 units. The project became known as the Towne and Country Shopping Center.

By the end of the decade, Wisconsin Rapids' population was 15,042.

The '60s: Revolution No. 9

Hippies, yippies, L.B.J., Cambodia, Laos, Viet Nam, moonlanding, policeriot, Chappaquiddick, snowmobiles, R.F.K., J.F.K., Martin Luther King, the New Frontier, recession, obsession, the Bay of Pigs, John Glenn, James Meredith, Green Berets, the Cuban Missile Crisis, topless swimsuits, peaceniks, rednecks, race riots, My Lai, Woodstock, the pill, L.S.D., pot, heart transplants, give peace a chance, Alyce from Dallas, Zakons '68, Elvis movies, Clean Gene, the Friendly Fountain, Fidel Castro, the demilitarized zone, the Corpsman Hall, the Peace Corps, the twist.

Building amidst confusion: the Kraft mill, the Riverview Hospital and the Labor Temple.

In the '60s, the Packers dominated the N.F.L. and Wisconsin went to the Rose Bowl. Pro baseball returned to Wisconsin Rapids. Marilyn Brahmstedt became Miss Wisconsin.

On the bad side, the Braves, successful on the baseball diamond in the late '50s, moved out of Milwaukee.

Population in 1960: 15,042. With a 1962 annexation of part of Grand Rapids, the population rose to 18,587 by 1970.

The '70s: Urban renewal

In the bicentennial '70s, structural changes within the architecture of Wisconsin Rapids occurred that were as monumental as any in its history. Government grants made possible the purchase of 44 properties on the West Side, including 15 retail businesses, nine taverns, five oil companies or gas stations, two barber shops and two restaurants. The result was Rapids Mall, built in 1978.

Removed were such landmarks as the Dixon Hotel, Fischer's Dairy, the Wisconsin Gas Co. buildings, Marling Lumber and the old City Hall. A new City Hall went up in 1978.

To replace the 44 properties purchased, the new mall had space for 44 small shops, in addition to Prange's, Penney's and the previously constructed Woolco store.

New taverns and discos to some extent assuaged the wounds of preservationists. The Mead Inn provided a striking addition as well.

Expansion on 8th Street South, begun in the 1950s, accelerated with the addition of shopping malls and fast-food franchises.

Downtown, the riverbank was cleared of old buildings, which made Wisconsin Rapids unrecognizable to many casual visitors. The new Riverview Expressway and bridge made it easier to get from the mall to 8th Street, but added to the confusion of massive change.

Supermarkets expanded and corner groceries closed, as did many corner gas stations, especially after the Arab Oil Embargo of 1973. Self-service and high gas prices depressed drivers.

Mid-State Technical Institute built a spacious campus in the town of Grand Rapids, as did Lincoln High School. West Junior High had been built earlier, and a new book depository and community center named McMillan Memorial Library.

Population in 1970: 18,587.

The total actually declined by 1980, largely due to a migration to outlying areas.

In the '70s, schools began cutting staffs. Some closed. One reason was a general economic decline.

Another reason for shutting down the schools was that the great baby boom of the late '40s was now a distant whimper.

1965: Down at Buzz's

"You don't have to go home, but you can't stay here!" The bartender's ultimatum came as a surprise to many. They thought they were already home.

At the Buzz's Bar of the 1960s, boys with little else in common than their youth felt like brothers. With all the time in the world and nothing much to do, we joked and laughed and hunched over pool tables, decked out in sweatshirts with the sleeves cut off and penny loafers without socks. The balding beer guts standing at the end of the bar bathed in smoky sun on a late afternoon were probably in their late 20s. But to us, they were hopelessly lost to middle age. That was something that would never happen to us.

Not at Buzz's, in the summer of the year Gale Garnett crooned from the juke box, "We'll sing in the sunshine. We'll laugh every day."

If they were our uncles and we were the boys of summer, who were the parental couple behind the bar? Certainly no one called them by their given names, Farnum and Lucille. They were always Buzz and Sis.

Buzz Bouton, born 1916, came up to Wisconsin Rapids from Peoria in 1936. Buzz's brother Carl, or "Red," had got Buzz a job at Preway. In a month, Preway laid him off and Buzz worked for Red at his bar, The Hole. Later, Red opened the Dixie Bar.

Buzz left to run the Grand Grill on 18th Ave. When cash ran short he went to the Ranch House on 7th Ave., a drive-in root beer stand. "I could serve 800 people," he said, "eight at a time."

In 1960, by that time long married to Sis, Buzz founded the institution on West Grand Ave. (across from the old city hall) that he named Buzz's Bar. "We used to have 300 kids a night," he said. "When they closed Club 9 and the Blue Note, I got all those people. They liked my place."

For those under 21, Buzz's for a while was the only bar in town. Beer and only beer, to be consumed on the premises, could be sold. The authorities knew we were still boys and so did Buzz and Sis. "If the kids needed a bawling out," said Sis, they got it. Buzz's first words to me, after I'd set my groggy head on his bar late on my 18th birthday, were, "If you're tired, go home."

One young man spent every night for 15 months at Buzz's. On those occasions when intemperance had compromised his judgment, Sis took him home and put the lad to bed in the hall.

When a troubled boy landed in jail, Buzz walked across the street and bailed him out. As the Viet Nam era draft took more patrons, many found in their mailboxes a letter from home, not from Mom but from Sis.

When a college boy drove down from Stevens Point to borrow money, Buzz handed over the ten spot without asking where it would be spent or when it would be repaid. The kid drove back to Point and spent the money on loose women and someone else's booze but never forgot the favor.

Other memories came to light last summer when over 200 former customers of the old Buzz's met at Robinson Park to savor a small portion of the camaraderie that meant so much. Afterward, many retired to the new Buzz's Bar at 131 3rd Ave. S., operated by Buzz and Sis and their son Gene, since 1978. It was as if all those middle-aged swillers we had scorned as they basked in the afternoon smoke had come together at once.

We might have imagined one of those earlier evenings of youthful indulgence when sooner or later we had to go, festooned in smoke and smelling of beer, staring across the jailhouse with bloodshot eyes, the last strains of the song playing in our ears.

"When a year has ended
And I have gone away
You'll often think about me
And what I used to say . . . "

Chapter Two
PLACES

A Walk With Vi

Vi Palmer greets me at the "St. Paul" depot. Now that the century has turned, she is almost grown, but not too old to brag. "We have four railroads. The Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul, the Northwestern, the Green Bay and the Soo Line."

"Noon!" she says. "That's the MacKinnon Hub and Spoke whistle. They make wheels for wagons. The hubs have to be absolutely perfect; a blemish could cause an accident. The rejects are sold for firewood. Fishermen use them to sit on. Many a family has used them for picnic seats."

We cross a muddy street in a boardinghouse district—Vi mentions Akey's and Meunier's—to a hexagonal bandstand.

"There is not a paved street in town," she complains. "Farmers don't dare drive to town in spring. At Corriveau's grocery and dry goods down on 4th and Grand, you will notice five steps from the wooden sidewalk to the store. That's to clear the mud off your shoes."

"And be careful," she cautions, "that you don't drop a dime between the slats of the sidewalk. You'll never be able to find it again."

Kitty-corner from Corriveau's is the First National Bank. According to Vi, its founder also was responsible for the "first ice cream social."

"It was about 1903 when J.D. Witter offered $1,000 to the Moravian church if they'd accept the challenge of raising the same amount. Farmers brought eggs and milk. People made the ice cream in their home freezers the night before. The mosquitoes were terrible, but from then on, they had ice cream socials."

Continuing east on Grand Avenue, between 3rd and 2nd avenues, we pass, on the south side, Church's drug store, Natwick's furniture, a barber, a grocery, a saloon and a meat market.

Across the street, a man is framed by his window, seated cross-legged on a table. "He's a

tailor," Vi explains. "That's so his material doesn't touch the floor."

The next block is traversed rather quickly.

"Quite a few taverns too," I suggest.

Past Centralia Hardware is a print shop and harness shop. "The printer hires boys to peddle his ads. And those steps going down to the little shack—that's the photographer's shop.

A pause to admire the iron railings and tall windows of the French-fashioned Lefebvre place is afforded comic relief by a man trudging down the mud street followed by three pigs.

"Oh, that's Stevie."

"One Halloween, the boys painted his pigs pink," she relates. "Dr. Norton, the vet, felt so sorry for him he took the paint off. Here's a man trying to make a living running a second-hand business, who can't count to five and doesn't go anywhere without his pigs."

At the bridge, I hesitate, afflicted by acrophobia and fear of water. She says not to worry. "When the circus comes to town, they take one elephant to the bridge. While the mayor and city officials watch, it puts one foot, then another forward. If the elephant decides it's safe, they say, 'Well, our bridge is good for another year.' "

At the east end of the pachyderm-certified, though possibly precarious structure, is the small post office, below which, Vi assures me, is a dairy. To prove it, she goes down and fetches a crock of fresh butter.

"My mother always sends me for it," she says.

On the south side of Grand Avenue, we pass Hirzy's jewels, Voss's Wood County Drug, and Kreuger's clothing for men—then turn north across another mud street onto 2nd.

Between the pedestrian and the river is a crowded row of busy shops the modern shopper may find fascinating. First is Muir's shoes, then Barnes' Candy Kitchen, in which we watch toffee being pulled on a large hook. After another saloon, stands John E. Daly's impressive new drug store. Outside is a clock that does not run, says Vi, because it is set at the exact time of Lincoln's assassination. Then a small ice cream emporium where the cold stuff sells for 10 cents a dish. "Made today from fresh cream," says the proprietor.

While I inspect the brushes at Gill's paint store, Vi window shops at Cohen's dry goods. Then we follow a short driveway to the river, where Vi says the fire engine backs in to fill its tank.

She indicates a large rock with a ring attached.

"I have seen the ferry they attached here," she says. "They kept it after the bridge was built because many a farmer felt his wagon was too heavy for their bridge."

Continuing along the river, 2nd Street becomes 1st Street. The shopping promenade continues, with the aroma of doughnuts from Herschleb's bakery. "We could get some fresh buns to go with that butter," I suggest.

Along past Steib's drugs is the Witter Hotel and a hat shop.

Aunty Rickman's candy store brings back memories. "We who had pennies could reach in the little striped candy bag," she reminisces. "She would give us an extra piece of gum. We loved Aunty Rickman."

We must stop at the large Spafford and Cole's dry goods before a drink at Cohen's watering trough on the market square. "That's for horses," she admonishes.

We cross the final mud street to Hasbrouck's livery, where it is well known a young man might hire a surrey and take his best girl for a ride.

The MacKinnon whistle blows again. "Six o'clock!" she says.

"It's late—but how about a last ride before I go?"

Crossing the bridge, I cast one look back at the long tier of buildings clinging to the riverbank: Cohen's, Aunty Rickman's, Daly's new block. I know I will not see them again soon.

Sporting Grounds

It has been called "that old cow pasture." Before that, the land now known as "Witter Field" may have been a lacrosse field for Menominee braves.

Any Indian athletes lost their claim in 1836 to land three miles on each side of the Wiconsin River. By 1840, Robert Bloomer, one of the first lumbermen and sawmill owners in Grand Rapids, bought from the United States 160 acres of land, including NESW 17. Bloomer probably logged off any pines before he sold out. The land changed hands several times before John and Margaret Compton tried unsuccessfully in 1856, to sell it to the Milwaukee and Horicon Railroad Company. After the death of John Compton, the land went to his wife, who married Alexander D. Worden, a local businessman. During the Worden tenure, a one-third-mile track on NESW 17 became known as Worden's Trotting Park.

A study by Everett Lambert quotes an early newspaper: "The earliest available knowledge of sports activities . . . is in the 1870's when local horsemen congregated at Worden's Trotting Park . . . and pitted the speed of their trotters and their driving skill . . . One of the early stars of the race track was Antoine Arpin with his little bay."

The Wordens got into financial difficulties that led to a sheriff's sale in 1876 of Compton's house, Worden's store and the land, for back taxes and debts. Cornelia Jackson, affiliated with Thomas B. Scott and J.D. Witter, obtained the 40 acres and sold it to the Wood County Agricultural and Mechanical Association, which agreed to "pay all taxes, lawfully assessed, upon said land, for the year 1876." They would also pay $650.

The first fair, held from Oct. 8-10, 1876, was called by the Grand Rapids Tribune, "A Grand Success in Every Particular."

An Oct. 13, 1877, story reviewed the development of the association. "Some two or three months ago, a few of our enterprising and thoughtful citizens conceived the idea of forming an agricultural society and to have an exhibition of Wood County products this fall if possible. Meetings were held with this end in view and on a certain Saturday afternoon the 'Wood County Agricultural and Mechanical Association' was organized by the election of Dr. G.F. Witter as president."

There was "work done in fencing and fitting the ground and in erecting proper buildings . . . a half-mile track, with ample sheds and space for the display of stock and machinery, has been enclosed with a tight board fence ten feet high."

Awards were offered in 55 classes, including horses, pigs, turkeys, farm and garden products, and baking. "For the handsomest lady on the grounds, the premium was awarded to Miss Mollie Meehan . . . and H.B. Philleo, the editor of the 'Reporter' pockets the change as being the ugliest looking man."

By August of 1883, improvements had been made. "The process of claying the new race track at the fair grounds is completed. Now . . . we shall be able to boast of as good half-mile track as there is in Wisconsin," said the newspaper.

"In later years, " according to the "History of Wood County," "the fair ran chiefly to horse racing of a kind that many patrons did not favor. Their patronage withdrawn, the fairs lost money."

"The agricultural regions near the city were then mostly undeveloped," concluded the History, "so the stockholders, feeling that there was not sufficient demand for their wares, decided in February 1897 to dispose of the grounds and discontinue the fair."

This resulted in an article in the Centralia Enterprise and Tribune of Feb. 13, 1897, pleading "Save the Fair Grounds." Twenty-five acres were to be sold under foreclosure proceedings, "but we hope no private individual will get it . . . . There is not an acre in the whole tract that is not worth two hundred dollars." The writer described a "large twelve-stall barn, a neat little dwelling, an exhibition hall and a grandstand," and warned of a "time coming when we will need a ward school house for that part of town."

On Feb. 27, the paper was able to report that "All is Well." The Grand Rapids Common Council agreed to pay all debts, including premiums awarded at the last fair, and allowed the fair to continue for five years, if there was a demand.

"Old" Lincoln High School

Though the land was free, the choice of the fair grounds site for a new school was controversial. A Dec. 1, 1900 meeting of the board of education considered five other properties. Nevertheless, the board voted 7-6 in February 1901 "that we secure from the city 8 acres in the Northwest corner of the Fair Grounds for a High School site.'" Dissenters immediately proposed that the

board secure an architect to consider remodeling Howe School, a motion that was rejected.

Manual Training Building

A second educational establishment on the same grounds was made possible by the will of J.D. Witter, which was disclosed in a June 1902 letter to the board of education. "I give, devise, and bequeath to the Board of Education of the City of Grand Rapids . . . the sum of Fifty Thousand Dollars . . . but not to be used . . . for the payment of the cost of the New High School Building now projected for the city." On March 25, 1907, the board approved 10-1-1, "that a manual training school to bear the name of J.D. Witter in some proper form be built the present year." A well-equipped structure costing $50,802 was built in 1908.

Wood County Normal School

Meetings to establish a normal school were held at the board office, and at J. Arpin's lumber company office. Feb. 10, 1903 minutes reveal that "the Board of Education of the city of Grand Rapids, Wisconsin, are informed that the Wood County Board of Supervisors are considering the advisability of starting a County Training School for Teachers, and also a County School of Agriculture and Domestic Science." The first classes of the new school were held in the Lincoln building.

After the city of Grand Rapids offered six acres for the school in 1906, the new normal school was built at a cost of $20,000, on the half-mile track formerly used for horse racing.

In 1914, the Wood County School of Agriculture and Domestic Science was organized and coordinated with the normal school under one managing board. The same building also housed the county superintendent of schools, the county agent and the county nurse.

A second Lincoln High School

The original Lincoln High School was demolished when a new Lincoln was built nearby, ready for the 1931 school year. The cost of the new building was $791,987, compared to $65,000 for the original structure. Part of the cost was the new fieldhouse, one of the largest in the state. The second Lincoln has been superseded by a third. The old building now is used as East Junior High School.

Witter Field

After 1902, the fair ground was called Lincoln Field. Not until Aug. 6, 1940, did it become Witter Field, by a resolution of the Wisconsin Rapids City Council honoring I.P. Witter as a "leading citizen."

The grandstand

In addition to high school teams, at least three baseball organizations have played at the Witter Field location. The first teams played to fans seated on an old wooden grandstand built originally in 1908. A May 6, 1949 newspaper comment implied a need for change. "Old boards throughout the grandstand have been replaced with new ones to lessen the possibility of snagging of clothing of the spectators." One summer, 13 fires in these bleachers were reported.

In 1950, the Tribune was happy to report "the Cinderella story of a $101,000 baseball stadium built for $57,000 by all of the people of a community that really enjoys its national game."

Red Raiders

As of 1980, the grandstand is still used for amateur and professional baseball. The high school football field is shared by teams from Lincoln and Assumption high schools. A warming house and ice rink are operated by the city. Tennis courts near 8th Street South still provide a distraction for motorists.

Wood County Normal School received its official notice of discontinuance in 1965 and was demolished in 1978.

The Manual Training School became the School of Vocational and Adult Education and, in 1969, Mid-State Technical Institute. Mid-State moved to new quarters in 1975. The old building was demolished in 1979 as part of a contract that included the remodeling of East Junior High School.

An old circular bandstand recalled by many old-timers is gone. Only a few of the oak trees shown in an 1876 photograph of Worden's Trotting Park still remain—if they are the same trees.

Horses don't race there, nor do warriors, but on the track not far from the old fair grounds, it is common to view a Red Raider, perhaps with the same sporting spirit, trotting around Witter Field.

A Store for Centralia

When Centralia was platted in 1856, there was already a store on the Nash block.

According to the 1923 History of Wood County, "The store mentioned as located on the site of the present Nash hardware store was for several years the only one in Centralia. One account attributes its origin to Orestes Garrison, who came to Wood County in 1854; another says it was built by George A. Corriveau, who later moved it one door south, where it may still be seen, being now used as a storehouse for the Nash concern. A third account says that the first store building in Centralia was erected by the mercantile and lumber firm of Jackson, Garrison and Worthington, who also bought and operated the old Marcott Mill."

Henry Jackson, Orestes Garrison and R.O. Worthington drew up the plans for Centralia. Garrison and Jackson paid the first taxes on property, which was assessed at $583.

In 1865, Garrison sold the land and store to George Corriveau, who sold in 1877 to Hippolyte Lefebvre. His daughter, Amelia, married Lawrence Nash, who acquired the property in 1884, as a partner with William T. Jones.

The Jones & Nash firm was founded in 1880. An 1882 advertisement in the Grand Rapids Tribune advised that for "Shelf and Heavy Hardware, Building Material, Farm Implements," the buyer would be wise to "call on Jones & Nash at the west end of the Wood County bridge."

The old store probably was used as a post office. The Wood County Reporter of May 6, 1886, wrote, "Messrs. Jones, Nash & Co. sustained a loss of $308 in stamps and $21 in currency by a recent burglary of the Centralia postoffice."

A new building was being planned. The May 1. 1886, Grand Rapids Tribune reported that "the cut stone for Jones & Nash's new building has arrived from Chicago Wednesday." The Tribune of July 17 said "The elevator for Jones & Nash's new brick store has arrived and will be put in position next week."

A Reporter update noted that "carpentry work on the new building was completed by the end of July." The new store was ready for the electric lighting that had just been introduced to the town.

During and after World War I, new construction expanded the facility, then known as the Nash Block. Through the years, space has been used for restaurants, beauty parlors, clothing stores, grocery stores, automobile dealerships and tinsmith workshops. When, in 1936, Montgomery Ward came to Wisconsin Rapids, it occupied the original Nash Hardware section on the east end of the building and the hardware store moved to the west end.

On April 23, 1937, the Nash Block was "demolished" by a "$250,000 fire." Five stores and six offices were destroyed, including a Piggly Wiggly grocery, Carey Electric, Hannon watch repair, a dental office and the law offices of Hugh Goggins, Byron D. Conway, W.J. Conway and M.S. King.

Again, the building was remodeled.

When Lawrence M. Nash died shortly thereafter, at the age of 82, his sons, Charles (known as "Peck") and George, took over the store. A third son, Neil, managed the streetcar line that terminated just outside.

A railroad spur installed about 1875 also served the building. With the nearby bridge, the corner was a transportation hub and a city landmark, architecturally prominent in the early days, when the second story was graced by a "semi-cupola."

One post-fire tenant of the Nash Block was radio station WFHR, which opened in November 1940. Arnie Strope, with WFHR since 1940, remembers that the Nash brothers, perhaps because of the fire of a few years past, "would never smoke in the store. If they had a cigarette, they went outside."

WFHR, along with every tenant except Montgomery Ward, moved out in 1958, when a Chicago man, Hyman Coen, purchased the building and remodeled it. "Montgomery Ward's newest retail store, and the latest addition to the Wisconsin Rapids mercantile scene," said the March 5, 1958, Daily Tribune, "is this two-story, block-long shopping center on W. Grand Ave."

In the 1970's, the facade began to appear outdated. Inside, double-hung windows became littered with crumbled caulking. The store looked small, old-fashioned and run-down. The two-story floor plan was too demanding for mall-spoiled shoppers. There was no air conditioning. In the 1980s, the relatively new upper floors were knocked into a very old basement and Centralia Hardware took on the familiar look of our town's most prominent architectural feature—the parking lot.

The Brick Block

It was a typical building in the River City landscape of 1900, 1930 and 1950. We walked by it a thousand times. Some of us, 10,000 times. We assimilated the silhouette into our mind's skyline. It became one piece of our "home town."

The brick facade had become grimy. The storefront was outdated. Still we shopped the stores, without thinking about the building they were in. We worried about having to go to the dentist, or doctor, in that upstairs office, even shuddered at the memory of a poignant groan in an old wooden step on the way up.

After a while, we shopped there less and not at all. Apartments replaced offices and the old firms closed up shop in favor of a series of tenants. It was a building whose time had come and gone.

One of many "brick blocks" erected in the late 1800s to replace frame structures flooded or burned away, the solid walls symbolized the owner's standing, accomplishment and responsible intent.

It—this common commercial establishment now being dismantled—was built in 1883. We refer to it usually as the Brauer building, because John Brauer's store occupied part of the premises, at the southeast corner of Oak and 2nd streets, since before 1920.

The builder, or financier, was George R. Gardner. Besides this and other business interests, Gardner "during his lifetime was known in legal and political circles throughout the state." His positions included district attorney, county judge, state legislator and mayor.

The construction of a new place of business was celebrated by the Wood County Reporter in February 1883. "The Gardner brick block has assumed a citified appearance this week the windows being all in. Each window in the second story contains two sashes and each sash has but one light of glass. The carpenter work in the finishing parts, such as a door and window casings is of the best and much pains is taken to have everything plumb. The boys are doing nice work and the building will be one of which our people may feel justly proud."

The Grand Rapids Tribune concluded similarly in April.

"The finest building, the most obliging accommodating proprietors, and the finest line of goods is what can be said of the city cash store. Their removal into the Gardner block is the finishing touch to the whole picture."

The Reporter called it "one of the best constructed buildings in the northwest."

In 1981, as a result of forces well documented in studies of inner-city or downtown decay, and of changing values, both aesthetic and practical, the Gardner block is being removed from the skyline by its owner, the Wood County National Bank. "We couldn't foresee any use that would justify the expense," said bank controller, Butch De Vries.

To make a parking lot possible, workmen take out the heavy white pine rafters and joists, remove the ceiling and inner walls, the floors.

When the now brittle square nails were driven in, Chester Arthur was president of the United States. It was the year of Buffalo Bill's first Wild West Show, the first National League baseball game and the first vaudeville show. The fountain pen was being invented and postage reduced to 2½ cents per half ounce. Not yet available were electric lights, telephones, elevators, steel-frame structures, fireproofing and reinforced concrete.

Vaudeville has been replaced by television. The fountain pen, by the computer. Come Sunday, postage will be 20 cents per first-class stamp. The National League plays on, buildings either reach the clouds or don't get off the ground at all and Buffalo Bill is dead.

To Bear the Burden

By January 1904, there was hope for a local haven of recuperation. Dr. J.W. Rockwell had opened rooms above the Otto Drug Store as a four- or five-bed hospital.

The Grand Rapids Tribune of Jan. 27, 1904, related the incident of a man who had fallen into a vat of boiling water. "He was taken at once to Dr. Rockwell's hospital, where everything possible was done to relieve his pain, though no hope was held out from the first for his recovery."

A March Tribune advertised Rockwell's establishment as "hospital rooms and nurses for a limited number of patients."

For post-operative discomfort, the Otto Drug Store offered Chamberlain's Pain Balm. "Wonderful things are done for the human body by surgery," stated the ad. "Organs are taken out and scraped and polished and put back, or they may be removed entirely."

Before many such miracles could be performed, a Wautoma resident changed his mind and built in Grand Rapids a real hospital, for the entire community.

That is, he built a house—until a doctor named Frank D. Humphrey convinced him to change it to a hospital. If it proved to be a bad idea, Humphrey was said to have reasoned with the owner, D.R. Evans, he could always convert it back to a house.

Evans was commended by the Wood County Reporter of Dec. 13, 1904: "D.R. Evans has done a noble work for our city in the erection of a hospital at the south end of High Street, of which the city can justly feel proud. It is a modern structure in every respect and the material and workmanship is second to none.

"Every room, except the third floor," boasted the Reporter, "is supplied with hot-water heat and electric light.

"The building and grounds have cost Mr. Evans about $4,000," according to the Reporter, "and it is not only an ornament to the city, but it is an honor to any little city the size of Grand Rapids to have located within its gates an institution of this kind."

This was Riverview Hospital in its first phase, with modern facilities and lots of fresh air, according to a promotional brochure published in 1905 that added this cautionary inspiration.

Wait not till your friend is dead
'Ere your compliments are said . . . .
But, onto our brother, here,
That poor praise is very dear
If you've any word of cheer,
Tell him so.

In 1912, the frame house used as a hospital closed due to lack of funds. The Riverview Hospital Association was formed to assume $4,200 in debts acquired by the old Grand Rapids Hospital Association and to keep the hospital open. The first board president was G.W. Mead.

Contributions by 43 persons who joined the organization and 13 corporations who donated 50 cents per employee enabled plumbing to be repaired and the hospital reopened. The first year saw 90 patients being treated.

Expenses for the first year included $12 for ice, $251.86 for fuel and $150 for milk. Service rendered to patients unable to pay amounted to $150.

Besides money, contributions by the association's friends came in the form of napkins, varnish, gasoline, pickles, preserves, bananas, books, apples, flannel gowns, chicken, tomatoes, a commode, marmalade, cranberries, doughnuts, meat loaf, pie plant, eggs and ginger ale. Potatoes were grown on ground adjoining the hospital.

In 1914, the cost of running the hospital was estimated at $239 per month. Receipts averaged $269. Any surplus went toward the old debt, which in 1916 was $1,800.

From the association's beginning, hopes were to build a new hospital. Wrote secretary of the board Elizabeth Wright, "We have a large contributing territory and our improved service will gradually overcome the habit of going to other towns for treatment."

When, in 1916, George Mead was able to report that the estate of Emily Witter had included a $10,000 bequest for a new hospital, the secretary wrote, "We trust that all the citizens will unite with the association and that before long we will have a modern well-equipped hospital."

Mead said he had in mind a building that would cost in the neighborhood of $25,000. To raise the additional $15,000, a week-long canvass of the city and adjoining area was conceived. The campaign was remarkably successful.

"The building will be built," said a 1917 newspaper account of the new Riverview Hospital fund drive, "and then year by year deteriorate as all material things do; but the civic spirit, the enlarged unified, truly Grand Rapids Get-together Spirit, that has been awakened and aroused as a result of the canvass will continue to grow day by day."

"By Saturday night, May 27," reported a local newspaper, "the citizens of Grand Rapids had subscribed $15,584 additional. Today, we have a hospital fund totaling $25,584. The new Riverview Hospital for Grand Rapids is assured."

The hospital opened in September 1917. A magnificent new building, it was "75 feet wide on Third (Street), 81 feet long on Sherman (Street)," two stories and basement, built of eight-inch concrete block with a brick veneer and finished inside with birch. The operating room featured fixtures that would "enable the surgeon to turn the rays of light at any angle desired."

The hospital would accommodate 30 patients.

A local newspaper supported the project enthusiastically: "why each one should subscribe generously, not alone for his particular selfish benefit perhaps, but because he had neighbors, and the poor man and his family had claims on us all, and we owed it to ourselves and to each other to prepare for those contingencies, which human experience everywhere always shows, are sure to confront communities."

The old hospital has been removed. The Riverview Hospital Association, however, continues with renewed vigor to press for improved facilities.

A community organization to support a community hospital, the association has 335 members who now pay dues of $2 per year.

As the latest fund drive concludes, many members would agree with the 1917 account and might also boast, "Over the door of it we could honestly inscribe in cut-stone letters, we bear one another's burdens."

Beauty Spot

No, they're not tearing down the old Consolidated office building at the northwest extremity of the Jackson Street Bridge.

Here is a charming, graceful, generous, perhaps even imaginative cottage of human dimension and earth materials, and it will not be reduced to parking space. No one has mentioned the ceilings being too high or the expense of heating. No federal dollars will be milked out of a distant capital to tear down a nearby wall.

Though many of its offices have moved into the new River Block building at 111 W. Jackson St., Consolidated Papers, Inc., will indefinitely retain its old home adjacent to the mill, for departments including public affairs and executive offices.

When the new Consolidated Water Power Co., purchased the property on which the paper mill is situated, in 1895, from Bertrand G. Chandos, it bought "also the island in the Wis. River which lies near the West bank of said River," approximately three additional acres.

Apparently, the first task was to construct "a beautiful stone bridge connecting First avenue with the island, where rustic arches and low stone walls on the road sides is pleasing to the eye."

The Grand Rapids Tribune of July 21, 1909, reported that, to replace a small, frame office, "The Consolidated people are calling for bids from local contractors for the erection of their office on the island, which they expect to put up during the present season. The structure will be of stone and will be unique in construction, and will no doubt present a handsome appearance when complete. The place on the island is an ideal one for the purpose intended and there is no question but what when the office is furnished it will be in keeping with the surroundings."

The following month, "The Consolidated Water Power & Paper Company let a contract to A.F. Billmyre [sic], architect and builder, during the past week for the erection of a fine new office building on the island west of the mill."

The structure was to be of stone, similar to that used in the arch bridge, and would be 40 by 50 feet. Water works, sewer, electric light, "and every other necessary convenience," were planned. All was to be "ready for occupancy before cold weather sets in."

Attention was paid to the grounds as well.

An Aug. 25 Tribune report stated that, "During the past week, Geo. W. Mead, manager of the Consolidated Water Power & Paper Co., has purchased the land lying between the MacKinnon block and the island which will be used to carry out the park scheme which includes the island where the company are now building."

The Reporter of Aug. 25, was pleased by the development. "When the improvements contemplated by the Consolidated people are completed the west side of the river will present a very nice appearance, and the only building on the entire river bank will be the MacKinnon block, which is of brick and not objectionable in appearance.

Early plans to finish by winter were unsuccessful. It was spring when a road was laid around the outer edges of the island and the slopes sodded. A stone wall was built along the edge of the road. The Reporter boasted, "This is certainly a great work, taken altogether, and the result will be that this company will do more to beautify the city this year, than the city itself has done during its entire existence."

By May 1910, "a one-story office of roughhewn stone, but elegantly equipped and furnished inside, crowns the highest point on the island. The best of the natural trees have been preserved, all the low spots on the island filled with good soil, and the whole well graded and sewn with lawn grass, and shrubs set out to produce the best ornamental effects . . . In another year's time it will be the most beautiful spot in a city that is not devoid of many natural and artificial beauty spots."

Pig Molds & Wet Feet

Workmen preparing to demolish a small building at 130 1st Ave. S. earlier this month found, stashed among the eaves, some browned and crumbling newspapers from the 1940s and two cast-iron forms, 3 inches wide and 3 feet long, identified as "pig molds." Not many years ago, newspapers were printed with lead type melted and reformed from "pigs."

The one-story brick building had housed the city's major newspaper for 50 years. Land records for that part of lots 2 and 3 of Block 10, original plat of Centralia, list a 1909 sale by John Schnabel to W.A. Drumb and A.B. Sutor, who had, since 1900, published the Grand Rapids Tribune, a weekly newspaper.

Their Sept. 1, 1909, issue announced that "Drumb & Sutor, proprietors of the Grand Rapids Tribune, are preparing to erect a new office building." It was to be one story, 28 by 80 feet, built with cement bricks and "as near modern and up to date as it is possible to build a printing office."

On Feb. 14, 1920, Drumb and Sutor sold the property and newspaper business to William F. Huffman Sr. for $10,000. Huffman, a Beloit College graduate, military veteran and already, at age 24, an experienced newsman, had purchased the rival Wisconsin Valley Leader on Oct. 6, 1919.

The Leader was eliminated immediately. When the Wood County version of the Tribune was discontinued, the new Daily Tribune became the only newspaper in town.

Among changes wrought by new management on the seven-year-old establishment was the addition of "The Tribune's New Goss Comet Press, the highest-class press made for newspapers of this size and cities the type of Grand Rapids." The new machine reportedly could print and fold 3,000 newspapers per hour. The press and three typesetting machines made "the Tribune one of the high-class newspaper offices in the state."

LaVerne Keller, who still works in the Daily Tribune "backshop," started with the company part time in 1942 at the older site. "It was all hot metal then," he said. "Everything was done in lead. The same metal was used over and over, remelted, and made into pigs. We had an old, coal-fired lead pot that we had to start with paper and kindling in the morning. We used long-handled ladles to pour the lead into pig makers.

"We set a lot of type by hand," said Keller. "The big headlines were always set by hand. On days the Ludlow (typesetter) would break, everything was set by hand."

In summer, recalled Keller, "it was noisy and hot. Each machine ran at over 500 degrees, and there was a 2-ton pot of hot lead. Ward's on the north and the creamery on the south didn't allow much circulation."

In spring, Keller said, the basement, containing the furnace, morgue and men's washroom, would flood. "We'd have to go down wearing hip boots," he said.

Another printer who worked in both the old and new buildings is Myron Johnson, who said, "When the wind was from the wrong direction, the downdraft blew coal smoke into the room." He said the smoke made "everything green," especially the workers.

Earl Worm, business manager of the Daily Tribune, began working in the old building in 1949. "We had an old, flat-bed press," he said, "and a metal pot they had to fire. On hot days, those guys would be wringing wet."

Don Krohn, a former Daily Tribune photographer and now public relations manager at Nekoosa Papers, Inc., recalled a darkroom next to the "shed" that stored rolls of paper. "In winter," Krohn said, "the solutions would freeze." Summer, he said, also had its problems.

Krohn remembers a small office crowded with Associated Press personnel working on a big local story. When the weather and the room became very hot, it was necessary to go to a nearby restaurant for ice cubes to keep the photographic chemicals cool enough to use.

Ahdawagam

To Frank Walsh, it seemed like he'd ridden the train all night just to get to the other side of the river when he looked at the sign at the depot: Grand Rapids, Pop. 5,200. The previous evening, he had left Grand Rapids—Grand Rapids, Mich.

"It was a nice April day," recalled Walsh. "There was high water when I walked across the bridge to the old Witter Hotel. The next morning, I went over to Consolidated and went to work."

His introduction was not to paper, but to furniture. Like Grand Rapids, Mich., Grand Rapids, Wis., was a center of furniture-making. The big Oberbeck Brothers Manufacturing Co. occupied the site of the present Consolidated Papers Inc. Paperboard Products Division.

The Oberbeck firm was incorporated locally "to build a factory and to manufacture, buy, sell and deal in furniture of all kinds and to buy, sell and deal in timber and timber land" by John Daly, J.D. Witter and Henry A. Sampson, in partnership with three Oberbeck brothers from Chicago.

A 1930 publication described the operation:

"Lumberjacks hewed the timber in front of the factory door and dragged in the logs for the making of furniture . . . . Factories in those days were frame structures and the Oberbeck plant was made of substantial lumber. There it stands today, the Ahdawagam Paper Products Co., manufacturers of cartons, solid and corrugated fibre board products, and spiral wound cores."

The first furniture was made in 1893, "the highest grade of bedroom furniture manufactured west of Chicago." By 1900, the business, according to Walsh, "was going downhill." It was reorganized in 1913 as Ahdawagam Furniture and was managed by George LaBour. "It happened that LaBour came from Grand Rapids, Mich." said Walsh. "When George Mead wanted someone for the accounting department at Consolidated, he wrote to me."

At that time, said Walsh, office personnel numbered about 12, including Mead, a sales manager, officer manager "and three girls."

Walsh didn't stay long at Consolidated. George Mead, by that time, had obtained control of Ahdawagam Furniture. "He asked me if I wouldn't go over and get things straightened out. I put in a new bookkeeping system in 1917."

When Consolidated's new No. 3 machine produced a surplus of heavy mill-wrapper, Mead converted the Ahdawagam Furniture Company to a manufacturer of paper cartons and tubes. That was in 1918, during World War I. With furniture declared a non-essential item, "obtaining foreign wood was a problem," said Walsh.

In 1922, Walsh replaced LaBour as manager of what was now the Ahdawagam Paper Product Co. The business had gone into a slump. "Stockholders didn't know whether to continue," said Walsh. "It was considered a white elephant."

But, "one more effort" brought a success that enabled Walsh, in 1930, to purchase Wisconsin Carton Co. of Stevens Point and move its equipment to the Wisconsin Rapids location. Ahdawagam then was able to produce folding cartons in a new, "modern" brick building adjacent to the old plant.

World War II revived the economy and Ahdawagam's prospects with a new product, laminated plastic used for glider floors and ammunition boxes. Paper cores also were in great demand and 80 percent of the total production was said to be directed toward the war effort.

Walsh managed the plastic production until 1954, when it was moved to new quarters as Consoweld Corporation. A 1948 merger transformed the independent Ahdawagam company into the Ahdawagam Division of Consolidated Water Power and Paper Co. Walsh brought a consulting firm into the new division and started the first industrial engineering firm at Consolidated. He headed a "time and motion study" of the Ahdawagam operation that developed an incentive pay system in use until 1972.

Important to the further success of Ahdawagam were tape cores used by Minnesota Mining and Manufacturing Co. for "Scotch" tapes. "Frank led that overall effort," said Groff Collett, vice president at CPI. "He maintained contact with 3M all by himself.

"In pioneering new areas," said Collett, "Frank was very, very successful."

In 1965, the Oberbeck building, known as the "old red barn"; made of two-inch lumber, square nails and three-inch maple floors, was razed to make room for a modern structure.

Walsh outlived three wives. The first, his Michigan sweetheart, did not survive the 1920 influenza epidemic. Walsh married again in 1922, but his second bride died two years later in childbirth.

Walsh's marriage to Eleanor Chamberlain lasted from 1936 until her death in 1977. He now lives alone in a house built by her parents in 1900.

"They operated on her father here on the dining room table," said Walsh, adding, "he died."

Had he grandchildren, that is one story Frank would relate. But, for his favorite anecdote, he will take us back across that two-sided river, back to Grand Rapids, Mich., in another state and another time to a sports palace known as the Olympic Club.

"There was a Polish kid in our neighborhood named Stanley Kieczl," relates Walsh, "who went to Butte, Mont., and became middleweight champ.

"They got Stanley to fight Jack Johnson once. He knocked Johnson down and made him so mad he beat the hell out of Stanley. Stanley only weighed 160 pounds.

"We had another middleweight champ, named Wolgast, who worked out at the Olympic Club. I went down to see the fellas there and the place wasn't busy so I sparred with Stanley. I weighed about 130. Then, I got in the ring with Wolgast. I couldn't get a chance to hit either of them.

"I'll never forget what Stanley said. He said, 'When you get to be an old grandfather, you can say you boxed two champion fighters in an afternoon and didn't once get knocked down.' "

The Corner Grocery

A census of grocers listed in the 1955 Wisconsin Rapids City Directory recalls a bygone era: Diebel, Eaton, Elliott, Farmer Store, Finer Foods Market, First Street Market, Gottschalk, Gross, Hack, High Street, Johnson Hill's, Margeson, McCamley, Meyer, Mumford, National Tea, Oestreich, Otto, Panter, Panzer, Peter's, Rapids Market, Shay, Stanley's Neighborhood Grocery, Sweet, Third Street, Van's.

These "corner groceries" were usually named for the families that ran them. Serving as shopping and social centers, these stores were often smaller than a supermarket executive's bathroom. They likely offered credit, delivered merchandise to patrons' residences, and took orders by phone. If you had a request or complaint, the owner was right behind the counter.

1955 was to mark the last stage of small store popularity. Twenty-three of the grocers listed then were not listed in 1961.

Another designation from the 1955 grocers explains much of the change. "Save More Super Market" had been built on the site of the present 8th Street D-Mart. Save More signaled the beginning of a new method of obtaining chops, chips, and Cheerios. The supermarket had come to central Wisconsin.

A 1980 list includes names like Foodlands, Food Ranch, Castle Foods, and Foodliner. These grand terms invoke images of commercial expanses much more vast than the neighborhood stores.

In 1983 there are only three "Mom and Pop" groceries left in Wisconsin Rapids.

Representing an age of small family business, they will remain only as long as their owners dedicate themselves to long hours at low pay. What is offered varies by the individual. For shoppers of the past there is a bit of nostalgia. For present customers there is personal service and the security of familiarity. And for the consumers of the future exists a working museum called "The Corner Grocery."

By 1990 the countdown may be over. Retirement of older owners and economic pressures on others will diminish or extinguish the corner grocery.

So if you're one of those kids who grew up sometime before 1955 and are moved to recollections of innocence and wonder by Archie Comics, Unbreakable Combs, Crayolas, Paramount Pies, Wrigley's Spearmint, paddle ball games, Notebook Paper, Rit Dye, and big bologna, better get down to the corner before it's too late.

If you were born later it is quite likely your next visit to an old fashioned neighborhood market will be your first.

Have your mother take you.

She may be shocked by the heart shaped rings that proclaim in contemporary voice, "Make Me!" "I Wanna Be Loved"; just tell her that not even in the corner grocery do all things stay the same forever.

Schism at St. Jacobi

As August Kath and his 12-year-old daughter, Amelia, walked from one Centralia store to the next, they noticed a short, dark man following them. He seemed to always be close enough to hear their conversation.

The two had driven a team of oxen from their homestead in the town of Rudolph, to buy provisions. At Johnson & Hill's, while the father ordered flour and sugar, the little girl wandered about the store. That gave the mysterious stranger his chance.

"Are you German?"

"Ya."

"Is this your father?"

"Ya."

The inquisitive dark man was the Rev. Leyhe, a German Lutheran minister who already had started several congregations. Having made introductions, Leyhe arranged to come out the following Sunday for a baptism and a confirmation.

The story was told to Mrs. Martha Gumz Getlinger by her mother, Amelia. It is included in "The Story of Rudolph," a brief history of the St. James Lutheran Church on County Trunk DD, written by Mrs. Getlinger.

When three German families moved in 1878 to the area northeast of Wisconsin Rapids and southeast of Rudolph, "the only Christian learning they received was what the parents had them learn from time to time and perhaps a reading from the Bible Sunday morning," the account states.

Then, the well-known Pastor Bittner came, she said. "By this time, more people had settled here and they held services in the schoolhouse. Many times, the school was locked and they would have to go two miles to the district clerk to get the keys. Bittner became disgusted and quit." It was then that the Germans decided to build a church. "The argument was where."

The argument was settled but not resolved by the gift of "a piece of land to build a church on" from one of the founding farmers, John T. Pagels.

"There were only five members who built the church," wrote Mrs. Getlinger. Besides Kath and Pagels, they were "Mr. Staffeld, Joe Reimer, and Herman Gumz."

The congregation then was known as St. Jacobi's. It would become St. Jacob's and in the 1930s, St. James.

Trees from the farms of the parishioners furnished the lumber, which was hauled to Stevens Point to be finished, and hauled back the same day. Pews were cut from one-inch lumber with a keyhole saw. A "man from Babcock" plastered the walls and built the chimney.

Records of the St. Jacobi group, stored in the archives of the Immanuel Lutheran Church of Wisconsin Rapids, begin in 1883. At a Dec. 28, 1895, church meeting, it was decided to erect a 25-by 40-foot building the next spring on land donated by Pagels.

An addition to the record by Otto Hille, a Lutheran minister, apparently from Junction City, who had served the St. Jacobi parish since November 1895, introduces a fractious element in the church's history. "Six members of the congregation stubbornly refused to agree on a church site," wrote Hille. "So, they withdrew from the congregation."

Mrs. Getlinger remembers her mother describing "the trouble."

"They argued about who pays what," she said. "Then, one man got up and said he was going and whoever agreed with him could follow."

The dissidents fairly promptly started their own congregation and named it St. John's. Slightly over a mile to the north, they built a small church. They also began a record book of their own. Their schism lasted for 10 years. The final record under the St. John's logo was a 1907 burial.

The building of St. Jacobi had split the congregation. But a few miles down the road, the graveyard held them stubbornly side by side, parishioners in what some refer to as eternity.

The Naming of Rudolph

Rudolph is a name silly enough to make reindeer pause. It has nothing to do with yuletide ruminants, however, as the honorific precedes the 20th century carol by many years.

In 1856, when counties such as Wood were formed and named, townships such as that described as Town 23 North Range 6 East also required official naming, as did the village near Mosquito Creek.

To achieve this end, a group of responsible citizens got together in Horace Hecox's living room and tried to think of a name. Supposedly, a tot creeping about the ankles of the men tugged at a responsive cuff. One of those charged with the responsibility of naming a place forevermore, turned to host Hecox and said that since the little fellow was the first white boy born in that province, it might be appropriate to name the town after him.

The boy's name was Fred Hecox. Most of the men were cool to "Frederick" so they went on to Frederick's middle name, "Rudolph."

F.R. Hecox had been born Jan. 29, 1855, the fourth child, after Helen, Philo, and Ella, of Elizabeth McGrigor and Horace Hemen Hecox, recently of Prairie du Sac, Wis., and Rochester, N.Y.

F. Rudolph helped on the Hecox farm as a boy. When he was old enough, he began hauling logs and timber. At 16, he worked on the new railroad at Centralia.

In 1881, Frederick Rudolph married Mary Elizabeth Curran, also of "Rudolph." The young couple rented the Compton place on the 5th Avenue hill. Three children were born there: Ella, Earl and Myrtle. Besides farming, Frederick engaged in the mobile butcher business, killing, dressing and delivering meat around the countryside. After a couple of unsuccessful years, he moved to a logging camp west of the Clark & Scott mill.

About 1886, he bought 80 acres in Sherry, where he worked in summer on the house he brought his family to in 1888, "with road so rough Mother and baby had to be tied onto the wagon," wrote Earl.

Frederick was able to haul wood from his land to Centralia and on the way back bring merchandise to the Clark & Scott mill, if he left before daylight and returned after dark. After Clark & Scott sold out in 1896, Frederick cut barrel staves, gardened and made maple syrup. He also served as clerk of the district school board.

While at the Sherry farm, the Hecoxes had three more children: Raymond, Beulah and Kathleen.

In March 1898, the Hecox exodus from their own Rudolph began. The eldest son, Earl, at the age of 16, departed for the state of Washington, to be followed a year later by his mother, brother and sisters. In 1901, their father joined them north of Yakima. Frederick liked it so well in the western climes that he sold his farm here and bought a fruit ranch, which he worked until he was 83. The last year of his life, he hoed by hand 10 acres of his orchard, dying Dec. 9, 1939.

His daughter, Ella Lynch, offered this written account of the Wisconsin farewell. "On May 17th 1899 Mama and us 5 children left Wis for Yakima, Wash. As we crossed the bridge at Clark & Scott's pond—near where Myrtle and I were born—It was snowing & people were skating on the pond. What a nerve racking experience for Mama to try to keep us still cooped up in that train for 5 days & nights. Things would look funny to us and we would giggle and giggle."

When the train arrived a day early in Yakima, Earl was not at the depot but with "Everything so green and warm . . . It seemed like entering Heaven."

Two years later, wrote Mrs. Lynch, after she had already gone to bed, a sister told her to hurry and dress, her father was waiting downstairs. "It was all so sudden I came down crying and shaking like I had a chill," she said.

That year, the last of Frederick and Mary's children was born. Her name was Marguerite.

After 38 years as a fruit grower, Frederick Rudolph Hecox died. An "old friend and fellow pioneer" of the Yakima valley, Sam F. Kiefer, whose Salt Lake City radio moniker apparently was Peter Spraynozzle of Sheepfold, eulogized the former northwoods farmer in a letter. "Fred R. Hicox was not a great man as great men are measured in the history book that children study in the school rooms—he was more than great, he was a grand man—a useful citizen—a pioneer."

Kiefer said Hecox was "a gentleman in whom the innocence of childhood mingle with the gray hair and the wisdom of Age." Certainly it was in the innocence of infancy that the eponymous Frederick Rudolph Hecox achieved a place in the history books and a kind of immortality, on maps, tax rolls, addresses, deeds and on a small sign at the village limits of Rudolph, Wis., pop. 392.

Native American Harvest

Native Americans conducted the first agribusiness in Wood County. The transaction was for cranberries, in 1828. Three canoe loads from the Cranmoor area were transported down the Yellow River to Necedah and on to the Chicago market. By 1849, a considerable trade in the wild fruit was carried on and by the end of the Civil War, commercial growing was well established.

After growers of European extraction domesticated the marshes here, in the 1870s, they hired Indians, along with whites, to harvest the berries, a practice that reached a peak in the early 20th century.

Gwendolyn Houghton, a Potowatami-Winnebago, worked in the early 1930s on the Searles marsh. The women, she said, picked berries in dry beds while the men raked in water. "We wore socks on our hands," she said, "as protection from the vines. We put a pan, any kind, like a dishpan, in front of us and would scoop up armloads of berries."

At the end of the day, the rakers picked up the full boxes, for which tickets were issued. On Saturdays, the tickets were exchanged for checks written by the marsh owner. The pay was 80 cents a box.

Mrs. Houghton said her family lived in a shanty with four rooms along each side. "It was first come, first serve, on the shanty," she said, otherwise you camped along nearby roads or at a marsh that provided campgrounds.

Ed Lincoln came to the Bennett marsh in 1928. "The old grandfather, Art Bennett, was kind of particular," he said. "Some guys might lay down and go to sleep or forget to shut the bulkhead so he always watched it himself."

Lincoln worked ten hour days raking in water. "In the afternoon, some guys would go on the dry raking. It all depends on the water."

Whole families came, he said, mostly Winnebagos with some Potowatami and some Chippewa. Lincoln remembered crews of 30-50 workers.

It is in some ways fitting that the Indian work the marshes he has harvested for 12,000 years. For only 100 years, however, has he worked as an employee, his land removed from his domain by legal ownership and treaties supposed to last "as long as the grass grows green in summer."

Many of the white families who started the commercial marshes 100 years ago have prospered. Cranberries are a million-barrel business in Wisconsin.

Many of the Indian families who delivered cranberries to white traders such as Daniel Whitney and Amable Grignon and later raked with hand implements for white owners have been replaced by mechanical rakers and more efficient techniques.

Much of the grass that used to turn green in summer has hardened into the sidewalks of the Grand Mall and whoever wants berries had better find them in a supermarket.