

Frogging Camp With Mud And Nile To Beautiful City Of Parks

By Norman Collier
214 Scott Street

At various times when there have been anniversary editions of our local newspaper, there has been omitted one feature which I have always considered to be of vital importance, namely the topography of the city, particularly the East Side, with which I am quite familiar myself, and in addition I have photographic notes which I took down from Fred Smith the Logger, Mrs. Russell, Alice White, and Robert Posey. The notes which I have from Mrs. Russell, White and her mother, Mrs. Russell, consider especially as being very authentic. Mrs. Russell came to town from Wausau, in a canoe, with two Indians doing the paddling. At that time there were only about a dozen shacks in the village, and she used to see the "Logging Camp" grow into a beautiful City of Parks. Therefore the early topography of the East Side will be given as I received it from them, and from notes which I have taken down in short-hand.

Main Street, as we all can imagine, was crooked road, full of bumps, mud holes, and it was even filthy. Where Center Avenue is, there was a deep gully, with quite a stream of water in it, extending from the Court House, now the Training School, down to the Wisconsin River. There even was a bridge across this gully on Main Street, and Miss White tells me it was a very nice bridge. The old log bridge, began to give out, and it was decided by the villagers to fill this gully with dirt from the numerous hills in the vicinity, much of it being taken from the present site of the Lincoln School.

There was quite a hill at the west end of the Court House grounds, this hill extending north along Court Street; there was a low place at the south-east corner of the jail grounds, and on Saturdays and Sundays the hill would be crowded with children playing in the winter time; it was very steep, and made a wonderful skating place, and safe as it was at the highway. Later this low place was filled in a little and a Mr. Kolbe started a foundation for a large hotel, which was never finished, and many years later was torn down.

Back of the Lighting Company building, and extending up as far as the Herald Office, was a swamp, which was filled in with saw-dust and shavings from the Andrews and Scott mills; there even was a railroad divert about where the Prairie Coal beds are. The high ground on First Street sloped down gradually to this swamp, and buildings erected on the west side of Main Street had no extending to do, and they were literally built at the edge of the swamp. Main street has seen considerable filling and leveling off; at one time the street was so low, that you could step right out of the buggy on the sidewalk; anywhere from the P & P Store down to the Bank corner. When Nussbaum's and Nohr's buildings were erected they had considerable trouble with the slabs and frame that had been damaged in this swamp, and when I put in a sewer my old stand, 1027 Main Street, being south from the building, we got slabs, dumps, and slabs buried in the slabs, that had been put in.

Going farther west, along First Street and Second streets, there was a low place extending from the Green House, west as far as the Post Office building. This swamp extended north-easterly nearly as far as Third Street in the 700 block, and there was a drainage ditch starting back of 212 Scott Street, the old Willert home, all the way down to the Prairie River. This ditch ran in a southerly direction, near the west end of the Green House, the G. A. R. hall, across the street thru the property west of the old Anderson Simon (now Hanson's) thru where the Pop Store and Arverson's Station are, to the Prairie River.

Part of the swamp was purchased by Dr. L. B. Collier, who had it for dumping ground of offensive material. The City Council tried to buy him from filling, as they thought it would be a health menace. He won out, and several of the homes built in the 500 block, the one which the Pop Factory is located on this filling, and others are built on this filling. In fact, this land is just about like what the City has been filling in where the City bridge is located. I caught frogs in a drainage ditch for my Dad to use for fishing.

Second Street, in the fall and

spring, was just terrible. I have seen wood teams mired in sink holes along this street, just east of the Post Office, and there were even times in the early days, when the street was impassable, and it was blocked off, and traffic re-routed north over Third Street. I have also seen wagons and horses mired on Main Street, ahead of the Van Ness Trading Apartments, and I recall how Joe Bartelme's drag tipped over with a load of flour right at this point, and flour in sacks scattered all over in the mud.

Again, traveling west, where the old building of the High School is, and the Water Works, this is a hill; just south of the old High School building, the hill sloped steeply down into the swamp, which A. H. Stange filled, and which later became our park. There were two or three buildings located where the Presbyterian Church is, and they were on pillars, and every spring and fall, or when the water was high, they were surrounded with water.

Located where the new part of the High School is, was the Central Mfg. Company, manufacturers of sash, doors and blinds; this operated for a few years, and then was struck by lightning, early one morning and burned. The old covered bridge across Prairie River, was located a trifle different from the present stone bridge; the east approach was about the same, but it extended up Grand Avenue. At the east approach to this bridge, Christy had a hoop and stave factory; later Morgan and Patterson purchased same, and I believe also did some custom sawing; it was then purchased by Thomas, who operated a saw-mill there for a few years, and following this, S. Heineman purchased same, and moved some of the equipment to Heineman. Test holes I have put down on the Library grounds, show old hoops, slabs and what-not buried in the muck under the filling put in by A. H. Stange.

At one time there was a Canal leading from the Prairie River near the dam at the swimming hole, cutting across between the Library and Presbyterian Church, and entering the Prairie River about where the tennis court is; this was for the purpose of shunting logs coming down the Prairie River; the complete explanation of the purpose of this canal would be too long for this article, but a portion of this old canal can still be seen if you take the railroad track from the weighing platform west, where the Wisconsin, in Willert to get logs into the Scott pocket, and across into the Wausau channel. Those of us on the Library Board of Trustees believe this canal has considerable to do with the water difficulty we have at the Library, as we have dug down, located the canal, and find the water is running quite a stream between slabs laid lengthwise when the canal was filled in.

The road from the Prairie River bridge, running east, was a roadway. As this sunk in the muck, another layer was laid on top, until I believe there must be at least four or five layers of this roadway. I have ridden along this road with my parents when the water was nearly up in the buggy box; later a sort of bridge or causeway was built, extending from the bridge as far east as the German M. E. Church; still later the planks of this double causeway were removed, and for nearly a whole summer teams worked filling in under same. The First Street car

barn, standing where the present bus barn is, was built on piling in order to keep same above the water level; this burned down, destroying the two street cars we had; same were replaced, however, by some second hand cars purchased in St. Louis. All the ground along first street from the German M. E. Church, east, including the south part of the depot grounds has seen considerable filling. Many of you will still remember "Lover's Lane," the high sidewalk along part of the south side of the street near the railroad tracks.

In closing this article, would like to tell what I consider a good story, especially for the children. This was told me by Geo. Schroeder. His folks ran a tavern, and boarding house in the early days, where the Green Hotel is; there were many Indians in the village at the time, and an old Indian especially, seemed to like Mrs. Schroeder, and came there of

ten for something to eat; Mrs. Schroeder could speak considerable Chippewa; and one day after the Indian had been there three or four times during the forenoon asking for something to eat, she got tired of it, and told him that if he came there again, she would get angry, very angry, and that when she got angry, her teeth came right out of her mouth. The Indian, looked at her, said "Ugh," went away, but came back a few minutes later; Mrs. Schroeder stamped her feet, jumped around, acted very angry, took her false teeth out of her mouth and shoved them in the face of the Indian, who looked at her in amazement, gave a loud war-whoop, ran as the Evil Spirit was after him, and she never saw him or his hair of that Indian again.

Some magnificent pine grew in this country years ago and boards 10 inches wide were common.



This Agency, established in 1890 by Joseph Downie has seen Merrill grow from a lumbering town to its present state

We have been proud to be citizens of Merrill, with its fine people, its beauty and community spirit. We trust that in serving the people of Merrill for nearly two-thirds of its life, that we have contributed our bit to its growth and betterment.

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