

# The 1870's

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# A Baraboo Air-Line Corporation — in 1871?

by Dr. Bob Dewel

Yes, there was indeed a "Baraboo Air-Line Corporation" right after the Civil War. That's 33 years before the Wright Brothers. Was Baraboo that far ahead of its time? What does it mean? Here is article seven of the series on the benefactors of Baraboo.

## The village is worried

There was a sense of uncertainty among the residents of little Baraboo in the mid-century years of 1850 to 1870. Everyone knew one thing was lacking.

True, the village had been named the county seat through the efforts of Preston Brigham and others, though this honor had to be frequently defended from proponents in other villages which coveted the privilege.

And the river! Only in Baraboo did the Baraboo river fall enough to be suitable for dams, so its power could be used to cut the lumber, grind the grain, and operate the looms in the woolen mill. There was room for five dams, and surely they would all be there forever, providing pollution-free energy. Other villages had to resort to smoke-belching steam engines.

Also, the beauty of the canoe-shaped valley could not be surpassed elsewhere in the state, with the quartzite bluffs on the north and south, and the narrows at each end, giving the valley a Shangri-la quality of seclusion. But, some said, maybe that was the problem!

our dams do not promise such glowing results.

## Efforts to attract a Railroad

It is not clear why the Corporation used the word "Air-Line" in their name, unless it meant, in those days, "as the crow flies" to describe a direct route from Chicago to Minneapolis. However, a railroad was considered essential in those virtually roadless days if a town was to survive.

The importance of Interstate highways today is somewhat of a comparison, though a system of secondary roads already existed to act as feeder lines for the new system. In the mid-nineteenth century, however, roads were minimal and railroad feeder lines followed, not preceded, the mail rail line.

To make matters even more troubling, Baraboo residents saw a rail line cut through Sauk County on the south, actually creating Spring Green. Another line cut the northeast corner of the county to Kilbourn (Wisconsin Dells now). These roads threatened the existence of Baraboo and its county seat. Progress might pass by the town.

There were efforts as early as 1852 to secure a rail line, sending both Col. James Maxwell and P.A.

road companies, organized or existing, which could potentially include Baraboo in their lines, but all came to naught, it seemed. Only in 1870, when the Air-Line was formed, was there real hope.

In October 1869, Col. S.V.R. Ableman and J.C. Lusk had revived the movement, so often frustrated in the past, and applied for a charter for a railroad through the Devils Lake pass. On July 1, 1870, the Air-Line Corporation was formed. Cole relates "Within two weeks after organization, (they) reached a basis of agreement with the Chicago and Northwestern Railway, which resulted in the actual construction of the road in the next year."

## Public funds for a railroad!

Progress is never without controversy, and the railroad proposal did require a very significant contribution from Baraboo and the townships and villages on the route. Baraboo's contribution was determined to be provision of the right of way, the depot grounds and large stock purchases.

The railroad's requirements, which it spelled out for Baraboo and from the towns and villages through which the line would pass, are curiously complicated. They were best explained 42 years later,

**BARABOO EXTENSION OPENING.**

**CHICAGO & NORTHWESTERN RAILWAY.**

Pass *T. Thomas*

MADISON TO BARABOO, SEPTEMBER 12TH, 1871, AND RETURN.

*Trains leave Madison, 8 A. M.*  
*" " Wauvakee, 8:30 A. M.*  
*" " Dane, 8:45 A. M.*  
*" " Iodi, 9 A. M.*  
*" " Merrimack, 9:45 A. M.*  
*Arrive at Baraboo, 11 A. M.*

*Returning leave Baraboo, 6 P. M.*

**T. THOMAS.**

submitted photo

Miss Mary M. Ruggles has a ticket (pass) which was issued to her parents, Mr. and Mrs. Daniel Ruggles, for the first train to be run from Baraboo to Madison when the Chicago and Northwestern began its service in 1871. The pass bears the printed signature of T. Thomas, for many years a Baraboo banker and an enthusiast for the iron horse to roll through the Baraboo valley.

Baraboo, who voted 347 to 3 in a referendum to bond the village, and 319 to 218 to sell the railroad stock back for \$100. They had tried to get a railroad for seventeen years, and the money was not going to stop them.

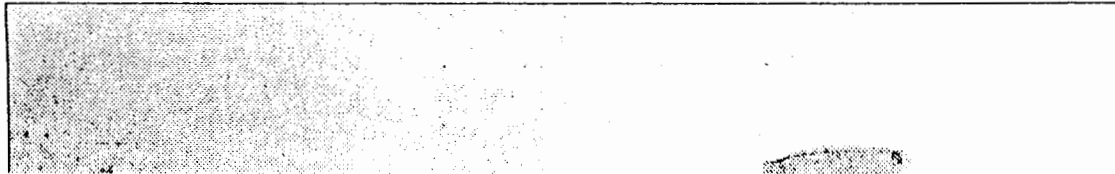
In today's dollars, the village paid the railroad somewhere in the millions of dollars to come to town. In those days, for example, dentures were \$20 each, and the *Baraboo Republic* cost \$2 a year. A magazine subscription for a year

with the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad by an act of the legislature in 1871.

## Observations

So, who are the benefactors of Baraboo, eligible to be included in this series of articles? One hesitates to name names of the men involved in the 17-year effort, but surely Col. Ableman, P.A. Basset and Col. James Maxwell should be mentioned. Cole and Butterfield list many others that were involved.

The real benefactor of Baraboo, however, was the village itself and the citizens who voted in the referendum to issue bonds for a privately owned company in a sometimes unscrupulous industry. It could



### The problem

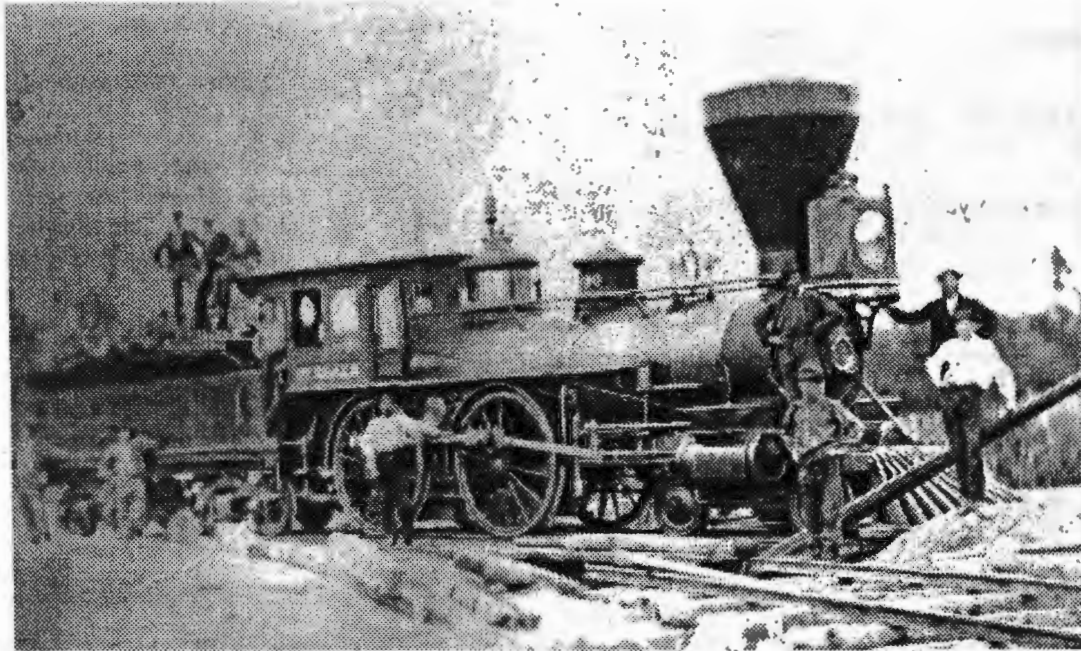
It wasn't that the residents were dissatisfied with the attractive location of Baraboo. Beautiful Devils Lake was nearby, but it would be six decades before Billy Warner, son of the proprietor of the American House hotel, would simplify the roundabout and swampy ways to get there by donating a direct route from the city to the lake. Why, just recently, he and some other rowdies pulled all the stage coaches out of the barn and onto the square in the middle of the night.

Even so, Baraboo was a grand place to live, but they still worried. Something must be done to assure its future growth.

And so, hardly a generation after Abe Wood became the first settler, 28 years after the Methodists formed the first church, and only 24 years since Preston Brigham and others platted the courthouse square, the struggling little community once known as Adams bravely rose up to invest in its future. How? By investing city tax funds in a railroad!

Historian Wm. Canfield said it best: "The rapids and town have heretofore labored under the disadvantage of being walled in by the Baraboo Range . . . making the building of road access to it difficult and the travel upon them tedious."

Writing in early 1871, he discussed the anticipated arrival of the railroad and then, in an expansive and sanguine mood, went on to say that on the river, "requiring a trifling outlay of money, the great National Ship Canal from Green Bay to the Mississippi can be brought to our doors." Today, even the advocates of destroying



Bassett "to Washington as lobbyists to assist in getting a grant of land for that purpose. A survey from Madison to Baraboo was made in 1853, another in 1863, and still another in 1870, the latter survey encouraging formation of the Baraboo Air-Line Corporation. This group had a trump card, for "it held the right of way through the Devils Lake gap" (Reul).

We decry politics and deception in our day, but here is what Butterfield says of those good old days: "A great many earnest efforts were made . . . but the citizens were deceived in the promises made them by the manager of Milwaukee's railroad interests. It was not until they 'put their shoulders to the wheel' that outside capital saw a safe interest in the construction of a road through the Baraboo Valley." Historian Cole confirms that statement also.

Cole lists no less than eight rail-

roads in 1913, in a refreshingly candid manner by the city attorney, V.H. Cady. He is the same attorney who, four years later, would advise the city not to accept the Al. Ringling Theatre as a gift, due to restrictions by the Ringling family which were not acceptable.

As explained by Cady, Baraboo had been required to secure bonding in the amount of \$70,000, at 7 percent interest. These bonds were then traded to the railroad for \$70,000 in railroad stock.

Amazingly, in 1880, they then had to sell the stock back to the railroad for \$100! For this, the railroad built a line from Milwaukee to Madison to connect with the Baraboo line. Thus the railroad got the bonds which the village was obligated to pay off in 15 years. The village got \$100 in return! It also got a railroad.

If this sounds like a bad deal to us today, it didn't to the citizens of

Baraboo. The *Republic* even advertised a sewing machine for \$3, without guarantees.

How good an investment would a railroad be? During the debate, resident Thomas said "it might be best to regard the loans (to the railroad) as sunk capital."

C.C. Remington was even more frank: "I want you people to vote [in the referendum] as if the subscribed were a gratuity from which you receive no return but the [railroad]. This, at least, is the risk you take".

Similar remarks by T.H. Warren were not quite understood, so he was asked, "Do we understand, Mr. Warren, that you go for [the road]?"

Warren replied "The whole hog, tail and all!"

Soon all villages and towns from Madison to Reedsburg fell in line, and the Baraboo Air-Line ceased to exist, being consolidated

only be described as a high stakes adventure. Now, in 1997, the city is in some ways more conservative, but has bonded itself for industrial parks and at least one major local industry.

Moreover, the city routinely supports such quasi-governmental groups as TIF districts, industrial and housing developments, baseball, tennis and hockey services and our zoo.

Even such public services as churches, the hospital and perhaps associated medical facilities are aided through tax forgiveness. Also supported in part are the University Center and the Library, both of which receive significant stipends.

Some feel the dramatic arts, in the form of the Al. Ringling Theatre, should be included in such stipends, all of which make Baraboo the special city it is.

It appears, therefore, that the 1870 village of Baraboo and the taxpayers living within its city limits should be listed as major benefactors, starting back with the railroads if not before.

The next installment will consider the Grand Celebration of the arrival of the first train. Also considered will be the small town boom and the resulting significance of the railroad to the city, the Ringling Circus, the Al. Ringling Theatre, the Mid-Continent Railway Museum and the Circus World Museum.

#### Sources:

- Historians Butterfield, Cole and Reul
- The Baraboo Library
- The Sauk County Historical Society
- The *Baraboo Republic*

# The great railroad gamble pays off

by Dr. Bob Dewel

*In article seven of this series, the efforts to induce a railroad to come to Baraboo were discussed, including the virtual gift of \$70,000 in 1871 dollars, a seven-figure dollar amount in today's dollars. This article picks up the story from the arrival of the first train through the glory years of the city and the railroad — the first four decades.*

## "That auspicious day"

On Wednesday Sept. 20, 1871, the *Baraboo Republic* positively gushed with pride, for one week earlier the first train on the Chicago and Northwestern Line (C&NW) had arrived in Baraboo.

It read in part: "There are glad occasions which retain their freshness . . . the people of Baraboo take a pleasure scarcely surpassed by the pride and delight we experienced on that auspicious day when the Queen of the Valley (Baraboo) was wedded to the King of the Northwest (the C&NW)."

One of the speakers was then quoted as saying he "could sink reverently upon my knees and thank God that the dream had come true." If this seems excessive, remember that it had taken 17 years of work an appointment

good racetrack," said the *Republic*. School for Baraboo's 666 children had not yet started.

No one had much interest in the vocal concert scheduled soon at Taylor Hall, but Reverend Holland planned to speak next Sunday on "The new Prospects and Responsibilities of Baraboo" resulting from the railroad.

Today, everyone eagerly awaited the arrival of the train, and at the half-mile post the cannon boomed again, as the train made the final approach, passing under an arch on the way, and then halting just beyond another arch in the railroad yard.

This arch must have been some-

celebrated, a roundhouse was being built, a depot was under construction, and work began on the extension through Reedsburg to a Tomah connection and on to LaCrosse. Baraboo was not only on the main line, it was suddenly an important cog in the railway system of the midwest.

The immediate effect was an increase not only of population but of industry. Historian Butterfield wrote, "There seems to have been an awakening of the progressive spirit that predominated in pioneer days, when mills and dwellings, schoolhouses and churches, were completed in a fortnight. Baraboo took on the airs of a city. There is

account of the village of Podunk (yes, Podunk) a few miles Northwest of LaValle, which had a store and rooming house. A railroad spur at Hillsboro had the curious name "Puckety Chute."

In terms of employment it is hard to make a good estimate. Lange speaks of 500 railroad employees in 1892, and a roundhouse photo shows 49 men (ten others were working) and a dog.

A railroad YMCA was located on the Northwest corner of Second and Ash. One of the division superintendents, C.A. Swineford, became mayor of Baraboo, and the railroad brought stops by two Presidents, R. B. Hayes and LaValle

days also, but with rail service. The same is true of their cousins, the Gollmars and their circus. The Moeller cousins might not have shared in the circus prosperity, and Alma Waite might not have inherited a fortune to give to the city and the museum. Moreover, there would be no circus museum in Baraboo!

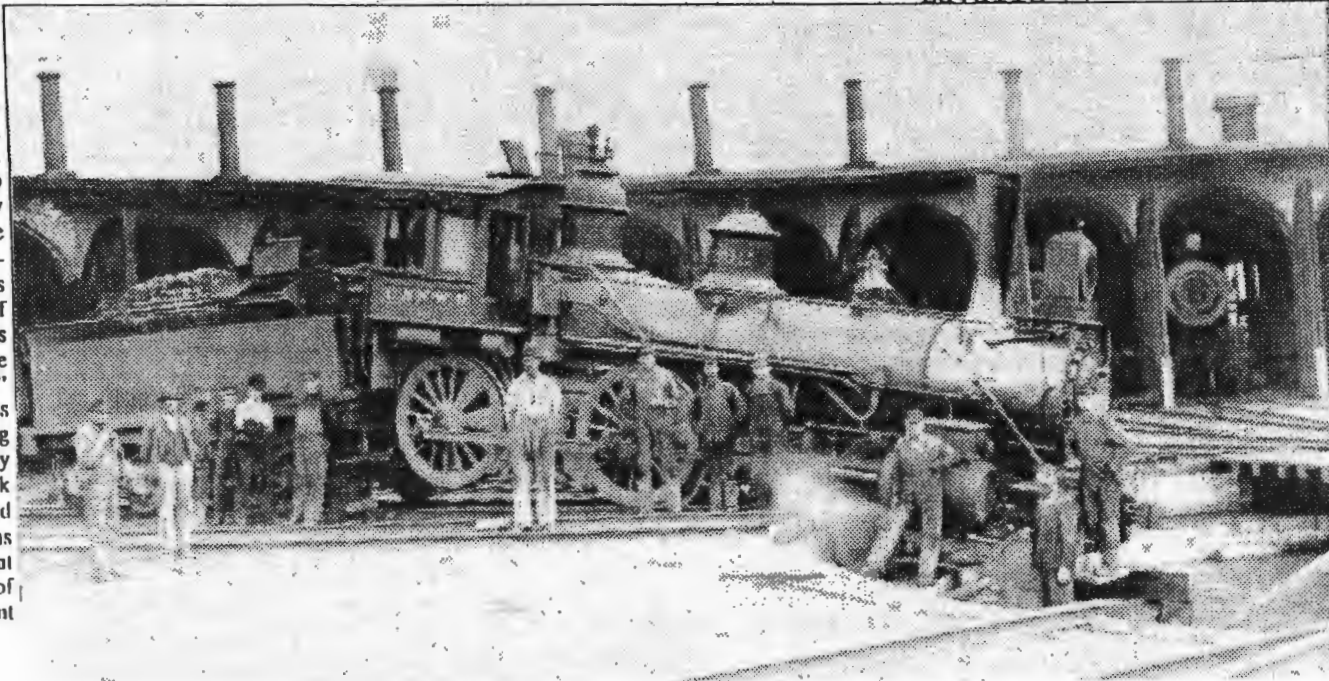
With Al. Ringling as a resident of Delavan or wherever, there would be no Al. Ringling Theatre, or it would be in some other city. The theatre itself depended on the railroad for much of its patronage in its first two decades. Reserved tickets were sold in the railway stations as far south as Beloit and as

far north as La Crosse, with patrons coming and going on the seven passenger trains each day, each way.

Carrying the analogy a bit farther, without the railroad and its North Freedom spur, there would be no Mid-continent Railway museum in the area!

## Some reflections

These above-named institutions alone give Baraboo a unique and attractive nature not enjoyed by other cities of even greater size in



to secure the railroad.

Scarcely two years had passed since Col. Ableman, signing the letter as "Locomotive," had written an open letter urging the community to once more put their "shoulders to the wheel" and again try for a rail line through Baraboo. In that time the Baraboo Air-Line Corporation had secured the vital rights to the Devils Lake gap, and then been absorbed into the C&NW line.

The 38 miles from Madison had required movement of two million cubic yards of earth, more than had been moved in the 242 miles from Chicago to Green Bay. Much of that had been the steely quartzite of the Baraboo Bluffs. Incidentally, after the climb to Devils Lake, the grade drops 1 percent into Baraboo.

But the work had proceeded in record time, and on Sept. 12, 1871, the train came from Madison, with 400 persons boarding it in Lodi, and 150 more in Merrimac. An estimated 10,000 persons were on hand, including the Governor.

### *The train arrives*

But more than people greeted the train: "A booming cannon was heard as far distant as Devils Lake, and the approaching train then stopped a mile short of the city. At this point "a bevy of a dozen or so young ladies, robed in white, decorated the locomotive most lavishly . . . with flags, evergreens, garlands of vines and flowers and scarlet berries, bouquets, streamers, and mottoes such as 'He mocketh at fear.'"

Scarcely a soul remained on the north side of the river at arrival time. Work stopped on the new saloon building on the south side of the square, and preparations for the upcoming county fair halted for the day--it was to have "a

thing to see, for every historian mentions it. "On either side (of the tracks) a ring of hop poles had been planted, forming columns of a large circumference. Through the spaces between the poles, hop vines were wreathed, until they were clad with green. On the crowns rested a broad arch, surmounted by a large keystone, on which were piled immense golden pumpkins, apples, wheat and, from the center sprang a flagstaff." Unfortunately, there is no picture.

Meantime the cannon roared, the engine bell clanged, the whistle sounded, and there were great

"huzzahs," music and speeches. The *Baraboo Republic* dutifully reported them all, written in the gracious and flowery style of the time. Of special interest was a message from Rosaline Peck, the first white woman to come to Baraboo more than thirty years previously. It was she whose china was wrecked by Abe Wood, as reported in a previous article.

### *A Division Headquarters*

Perhaps more significant than the arrival of the rail line was the fact that Baraboo, half-way between Chicago and the Twin Cities, was designated the Division Headquarters! Even as the citizens

no denying the fact that the permanent location of the division headquarters has put Baraboo in the front rank of interior cities in Wisconsin. Baraboo . . . reaps vast benefits from the road."

Substantial improvements soon followed, increasing the roundhouse to 25 stalls, as well as shops and maintenance facilities.

### *A Railroad boom*

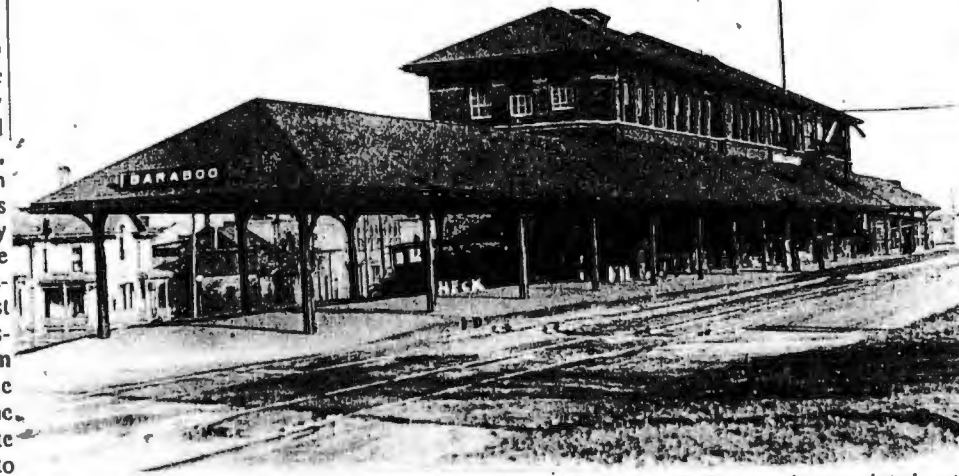
By any measure it appears that the speculative gamble by the city in 1871 paid off handsomely. New industries and the increase in population provided a larger tax base.

Herbert Hoover.

An idea of the value of a dollar in those days can be determined by the rate schedule of 1909, where a month's salary for a brakeman or flagman was \$62.50. In a class by themselves were the engineers, at \$144.40 per month. During the Great Depression railroad employees were envied for their good salaries and job security.

### *What might have been*

It is not the purpose of this article to chronicle the rise and fall of the railroad, nor its recent modest return of service to local indus-



tries. Rather we have pointed out its importance to the young city of the late 1800s. But there are lingering effects even today of that era.

For example, suppose the railroad had never come. Even if the Ringling Brothers had started a small circus, when the time came for a switch to rail travel, they would surely have moved, perhaps to Delavan, a circus town in those

tries. Rather we have pointed out its importance to the young city of the late 1800s. But there are lingering effects even today of that era.

For example, suppose the railroad had never come. Even if the Ringling Brothers had started a small circus, when the time came for a switch to rail travel, they would surely have moved, perhaps to Delavan, a circus town in those

Wisconsin. They represent not only our past, so closely dependent on the

presence of a railroad, but our present as an interesting place to live and work. They also present a promising future as a city with quality historical attractions, and one worth visiting.

All three rely on local volunteers, and all need occasional benevolent donations from the citizenry.

The city fathers of 1870 wisely chose to invest in the future of Baraboo. Their investment paid off handsomely. Though the railroad is no longer the behemoth it once was, its beneficial effects on our city linger in the above-named facilities and its present industrial services.

Many local institutions, and especially the theatre at the present time, will require benefactors with similar vision if we are to retain the rich heritage that makes Baraboo the unique city it is.

Sources:

- Historians Butterworth, Cole, Lange
- Library and Historical Society

*This article does not purport to be a complete history of the railroad. Interested persons should see the excellent article on the Baraboo railroad in the 1995 issue of "Northwestern Lines." It is published by the Northwestern Railroad Historical Society, and was authored by Baraboo railroad historian Mark Carlson. It can be seen at the library or the historical society.*

## Baraboo Became Railroad Freight Center, 1871

### Tales of Other Days

By Bob Dewel

Long-time readers of my articles may remember two stories dealing with the auspicious arrival of the railroad in Baraboo in 1871. Its arrival culminated years of effort by a local group with the curious name "Baraboo Air Line Corporation".

Railroads were the superhighways of their time, often creating and sometimes making or breaking a town. Sauk County's once thriving village of Newport, now gone from the map, was a victim of railroad's importance.

My previous articles were limited to the arrival and the early days of the 1871 railroad. The City-to-be had bonded \$70,000, a huge sum in those days, to entice the railroad to come. People then realized the importance of facilities in a growing city, and were told in advance that they would never see that money again. Even so, the bond issue passed, 347 to 3, a sign of their confidence in the future. One suspects they would have been astonished at our crass attitude about modern requirements, as demonstrated by our recent series of failed school referenda.

In this article we will review a story by Baraboo's Mark Carlson in *Northwestern Lines* magazine, Vol. 22, published in 1995. That article concerns principally the freight service that developed. Later we will review a similar article on the amazing passenger service the area once enjoyed.



Credit: Mark Carlson Collection

In this early picture before the Wisconsin River was dammed, a freight train begins its crossing from the Okee side of the river



Credit: Mark Carlson Collection

In this picture a passenger train halts as it approaches the Merrimac shore. Most of each stone abutment is now under water. Note the trainman posing in front of the steam engine.

#### Early Freight History

Despite the public appeal of passenger service, the freight service probably had more of an impact of the two on the prosperity of the community. The 1880 History of Sauk County says it placed Baraboo "in the front rank of interior cities in Wisconsin." In 1892 the Republic proudly announced that the railroad payroll amounted to \$30,000 per month, a huge sum in 1892 dollars, with engineers receiving the magnificent (then) sum of \$60 per month.

Carlson reports that when the city incorporated in 1882, the first mayor was C.A. Swineford, the railroad division Superintendent. Carlson says that Baraboo dominated Madison, with a 28-stall roundhouse compared to Madison's nine stalls. Baraboo was in fact the division headquarters until 1933.

In 1896 the entire line was double-tracked. This was said to be 'the costliest continuous railroad construction in the state.' Despite this improvement, the railroad elected to establish a new and more level line through Adams in 1911, and in 1924 the Baraboo shops were closed and moved to Madison. We reported in another article how the NW Railroad contributed significantly to the cost of the YMCA building.

#### Division moves to Madison

The division headquarters was moved to Madison in 1933. Although the road continued passenger and freight operations for another 30 years, Baraboo was no longer the center of operations, and the financial loss to the community was great. Coupled with the loss of the circus headquarters and its rail operations in 1918, it is said that the Depression began in Baraboo long before it hit the nation in 1929.

Carlson's article, augmented with remarks by John Gruber, is replete with about 36 excellent photos, many in color, depicting engines and trains and scenes in the county. In addition there is recognition and considerable information regarding the many types of engines and other train operations.

#### Bridge at Merrimac

Of special interest is the bridge at Merrimac. This structure, still in use today, replaced the earlier wooden one in 1878, and was complete with a draw section for anticipated river traffic which rarely materialized. There is however, a picture of a two story passenger and cargo riverboat passing through with the drawbridge open. The dam at Prairie du Sac was not completed until 1914, some 43 years after the railroad first crossed the valley, but the railroad bridge was high enough that it did not have to be rebuilt because of the new water level.

There is no way this article can do justice to the importance of the freight operations from 1871 to the present day. There were hauls from the iron mines of Baraboo and North Freedom, plus the quartzite from Rock Springs, and indeed from a Devils Lake quarry before 1905, as well as circus operations and yard switching. Suffice to say, Baraboo must have been a tooting and whistling town in those days.

An original copy of the Northwestern Magazine can be viewed at the Sauk County Historical Society, and they will soon have a copy of a succeeding issue regarding passenger train service, which I will review in my next article.



Mark Carlson Collection

The Freight Yard and Roundhouse in Baraboo



# A Whistlin' and Tootin' Railroad Town

## ~~Tales of Other Days~~

By Bob Dewel

This is my fourth article on the railroad in Sauk County. Two were written in 1997 and dealt with the arrival of the railroad in 1871. A recent story reported on the subsequent freight operations and their importance to the area. In this article I will include a report on the once-ubiquitous passenger service the area enjoyed then, but which is now long gone.

There is far more information available than can be condensed into even four stories. For the serious railroad buff I suggest that they consult the 1995 Northwestern Lines magazines at the Sauk County Historical Society library, two of which have stories authored largely by Baraboo's Mark Carlson. The railroad has been a factor in Baraboo life for 135 years.

### The Whistles

Baraboo must have been a whistling and tooting town in the old days. Carlson reports that in 1910 there were at least 41 freight and passenger trains passing through the city per day. Now 41 trains a day, with four toots per crossing, and five crossings really adds up. Four toots times five crossings makes 20 toots per train, times 41 trains, or a total of 820 toots and whistles!!

In addition, there was an occasional switch engine whistle to add to the cacophony, plus the Ringling and Gollmar circus trains! Add to this the woolen mill whistle and perhaps others, and you have a whistling and tooting town for sure!

The presence of the railroad was noted in another way also, for during the days of steam power, the acrid smell of burning coal, combined with black soot, blanketed the city. This was particularly noticeable by the presence of soot on a new snowfall. The fouling of the air was enhanced by the fact that most homes and stores also heated with coal,

No wonder some of our buildings had to be cleaned or sandblasted in recent years to restore the appearance of the stone or brick. However, there was little complaint from anyone in the early days, for the railroad meant jobs and progress. No one knew of a better fuel than coal until the arrival of diesel engines for the trains and gas heat for the homes. Now we are dependent on foreign sources and political influence for our energy supply and its cost, a dangerous threat to our national security.

Like so many industries over the decades, the railroad reached its zenith and then declined. This was particularly apparent in Baraboo, which not only saw the slow decline in freight and passenger service, but the inevitable movement of the division operation to Madison, our voracious behemoth to the south and east.

### Passenger service

It is hard for a modern day person to realize the importance of railroad passenger service to the economy of the region. Few of the blue highways were paved in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, and 4-lane interstates systems would have been ridiculed as unaffordable. The passenger trains seemed to go everywhere, with interconnecting services to all lines, so that one could easily travel from the largest city to the smallest community.

Railroad schedules seem baffling compared to our modern airline schedules, none of which serve cities generally smaller than 100,000 persons. Sauk County even had a siding called Podunk, where some local trains would stop if signaled for a passenger. In some areas, stage coach service, sometimes motorized, would provide passage as was the case between Baraboo and Kilbourn (now Wis. Dells).



*Mark Carlson Collection*

*A steam freight train roars through Baraboo. The passenger station is in the background*

#### Excursions

The railroads were quick to recognize the possibility of train excursions to places like Devils Lake. We have written previously of such events, and the Northwestern Lines article gives examples of fares. One ad touts round trip passage from Chicago, to include 6 nights at the old Devi Bara Resort near the park, for as little as \$35.80 "and up". Chula Vista at Kilbourn was another destination, with transportation and 2 or 3 nights lodging for \$10.30 also "and up". One day in 1894 two trains brought 2200 persons to Devils Lake, most just for the day, and later it required three trains and 34 coaches for a similar day's excursion.

#### The Decline

In 1905 a survey showed that 2763 persons worked in Baraboo, of whom 362, or 13%, worked for the railroad. That's one in every eight workmen. It is hard to identify the peak and eventual decline of the railroad in the area, however. For decades after the 1871 arrival, it seemed as if the company could not do enough for Baraboo. By 1892 some 500 men were employed, and double track was installed in 1896 to handle the traffic.

The new passenger station in 1902 seemed to predict nothing but progress, and the circus activities and Devils Lake attraction seemed to provide a bright future. In August, 1937, the famed Chicago-Minneapolis 400 passed through Baraboo, but only until June, 1937, when it was rerouted through Adams. Other 400's regularly stopped, with destinations of Duluth and Rochester and on west.



*Mark Carlson Collection*

*A freight escapes from the Baraboo Bluffs at Rock Springs*

Few if any had noticed a change in the wind when many freight and passenger operations were shifted to the new alternate route through Adams in 1911. By 1933, however, the killing blow fell with the removal of the division operation to Madison. The last steam engine to make a run through Baraboo was in 1956, but the quarry operations at Rock Springs seemed to insure future operations, which indeed it has to this day.

The last passenger train whistled a farewell in 1963, and the freight office closed in 1984. In recent years freight operations have seen an upturn, with significant deliveries to industries in Baraboo and Reedsburg, in addition to the pink lady operation. As for the future, some thought is being given to a commuter and excursion train between Madison and Baraboo. Mid-Continent Railway operations could expand also, and the whistles and toots of the old days, so rare at the present time, may be heard again resounding through the valley.

As was indicated above, this is a huge and fascinating subject, and the serious reader should consult with the library and Historical Society for detailed information.





## The Western Hotel, once Baraboo's Finest Yesteryear Revisited

By Bob Dewel

The building pictured with this article was once one of the most important buildings in Baraboo. It was known for most of its existence as the Western Hotel.

The name is appropriate, for, looking at the picture, one can almost picture a cowboy jumping the railing of the second floor porch, and landing on his horse. Then, just as in the movies, he scoops up his sweetheart at the corner, and they go galloping off down Fourth Avenue. Early Baraboo had a distinctive western flavor.

We have no record of such an event but we do know a lot about this hotel thanks to the Baraboo Intensive Survey, the Sauk County Historical Society, and especially to Joe Ward, an expert on the history of buildings in downtown Baraboo.

### A local institution

The Western House, known originally as the Adams House, was built in 1847 by Colonel Edward Sumner. The building, was located on the Southeastern corner of Oak and Fourth Street, and underwent several enlargements from its original rather modest size. It served, along with Taylor Hall, the Courthouse, and the Methodist Church, as a meeting place for the growing community.

Traveling salesmen, land speculators, judicial circuit officers, and other visitors stayed there. Perhaps the strangest use, however, was the employment of an occasional room or so as a jail. As reported in a previous article, this matter was the subject of a heated editorial in the local newspaper, probably the short lived Sauk County Standard, which reported in 1857 that

the prisoner not only slept there but dined with the other guests.

He had the freedom to roam the city streets during the day, "gossiping with clerks and merchants until the gong sounded for dinner, which meal he eats with as good grace as if he, instead of the county, paid for it. He has no disposition to run away, considering himself the best-treated man in Sauk County. We understand that the Sheriff proposed him to work on his farm, but was informed by the gentlemanly prisoner that the county had agreed to support him three months without work."

### Other owners

In 1855 Colonel Sumner sold the Western House to Dunn and Davis, who in turn sold it to William Wallace, who, in 1870, sold it to a Mr. Campbell. The business seems to have been known as both the Western House and the Western Hotel, and its most famous visitor was Mrs. Abraham Lincoln. She had been staying at the Cliff House at Devils Lake, but stopped at the Western Hotel before leaving the area.

The proprietor of the Cliff House, William B. Pearl, was for a short time owner of the Western Hotel. However, fire destroyed the Western Hotel, indeed all of the Oak Street buildings from Third to Fourth Street, on November 6, 1878. A year or so previously, fire had destroyed most of the buildings on Fourth Street, and a similar fate befell much of the rest of the downtown, sparing only the ancient building at 137 Third Avenue, as reported in a recent article.

### Other owners

The Western was not Baraboo's only hotel. In 1843 James Webster erected a small hotel, location not given, and in about 1847 Lyman Clark built the Baraboo hotel on the South Side, on the northwest corner of Walnut and Lynn Streets.. In the early 1850's, the Wisconsin House was erected on the present site of the Al Ringling Theatre, and it will be pictured in the next article. The Baraboo Intensive Survey also

reports a City Hotel being built about this time "under the hill".

All of this was before the arrival of the Northwestern Railroad in 1871, at which time several hotels sprang up around the depot. The Pratt House was at 201 Vine. Another small hotel was known both as the Commercial Hotel and the American Hotel, located at the northeast corner of Maple and Walnut. The Baraboo Intensive survey also lists the Bay State House, G.H. Shepherd, proprietor, and the Railway House, G.A. Pabodie, proprietor.

This sounds like a lot of hotels for the young city, indeed more than Baraboo has now, though the total number of rooms would be considerably less than the combined hotel and motel rooms available today. There is more to the hotel story, with more pictures, to be found in the next article.



Sauk County Historical Society

The Western Hotel stood on the Southeast corner of Oak and Fourth Streets in downtown Baraboo

## Old Buildings and Big Boxes, Part One

Yesteryear Revisited

By Bob Dewel

Which is the oldest building in Downtown Baraboo? Who opened the first store in the settlement? Were "chain stores" the death knell of local merchants, as predicted? Were Sears and J.C. Penney's, the big boxes of their day, a threat to the local establishment?

The

### First Store

Challenging questions, so let's begin at the beginning. It appears, from the early histories, that the first store in the Baraboo Rapids area was not even owned by Baraboo settlers! None other than Count Haraszthy, the entrepreneur from the village which bore his name (now Sauk City) was the absentee owner of Baraboo's first store.

Haraszthy was a promoter, and developed other ventures in the area, including a steamboat on the Wisconsin River! Inexplicably, on Christmas Day 1848, he loaded up his family and headed for California, where he subsequently became a state leader in many fields, including making wine. What happened to his Baraboo store is not known.

Haraszthy's importance on the California scene is quite impressive, and internet browsers need only type in Haraszthy on Google and some nine articles will appear, ranging from his early election as sheriff of San Diego County to his death, possibly due to an encounter with an alligator. Haraszthy deserves a separate article, which may appear in due time.

The

### Oldest Building

The growth of the Baraboo River rapids area into a collection of villages named Adams, Manchester, Lyons, and Baraboo is chronicled in previous articles. As is well known, the name

Baraboo was adopted for the entire group except Lyons, with the Adams section and its courthouse square dominating the scene. Lyons (now West Baraboo) was platted even before Baraboo, and continues to maintain its independence, though it does not maintain a police force and certain other customary village obligations, despite recent growth.

Downtown Baraboo continued to thrive. Thanks to Joe Ward, local research expert on downtown Baraboo, we have a rather complete history of what is probably the oldest downtown building, namely the recently restored frame building at 137 Third Avenue. How it was spared from the fires that ravaged the city in the 1860's through the 1880's is not known.

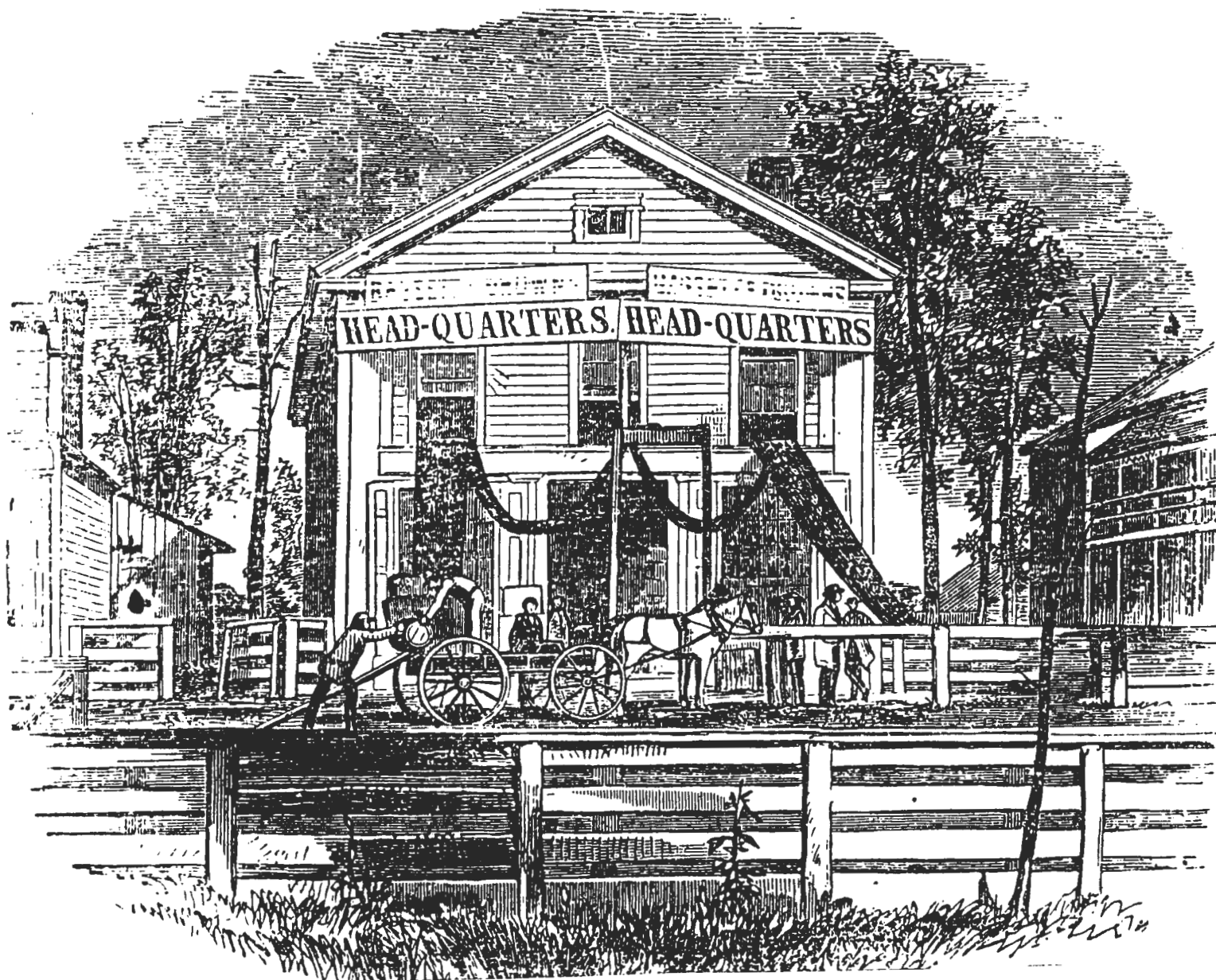
Ward has generously shared his extensive knowledge of the history of the structure with us. It appears that the building was constructed in about 1850, by P.A. Bassett, local mill operator with many business interests. It was known as the Headquarters Store, and a sketch accompanies this article. Note that there appears to be a park or vacant lot to the west, where the Sauey Building and Shoe Box store now reside. Both buildings were recently restored by Bill Sauey, adding an attractive and important corner to downtown Baraboo.

The Headquarters Store sold groceries, dry goods, and general merchandise, apparently a typical old fashioned general store. Its revival in 1887 by M.J. Drown made it into a model establishment, doing an astounding \$30-40,000 business a year. Drown, like Bassett, was one of the village leaders, having purchased what remained of the Wood and Rowan dam and sawmill, idle since 1847. This property eventually became the Island Woolen Mill, Baraboo's principal industry for many decades.

Drown's interest in the Headquarters store was therefore only one of his enterprises, On Dec. 8, 1887, the Headquarters store was converted



"Headquarters" General Store - erected ca. 1852  
137 Third Avenue



to Barstow Flour and Feed, and remained so until its 50<sup>th</sup> birthday, in 1902. There is much more to be told of the story of this ancient building, now so handsomely restored. To be continued, including the big boxes of earlier years.

## Part 2, The Oldest Building and Big Boxes

Yesteryear Revisited

By Bob Dewel

As was noted in the previous article, the 1850 Headquarters General Store at 137 Third Avenue found itself serving, 50 years later, as the Barstow Flour and Feed. Flour and feed were essential businesses in those days, and Barstow was succeeded in December, 1902, by the Ben S. Doty Seeds and Feeds.

Within a year, however, the business was sold to P.H. Keyser, to be known as the Keyser and Kachel Seed and Feed. This was succeeded in 1910, when Jerome Briggs took over, as Briggs and Co., Grocer, Flour, and Feed. Griggs moved to 616 Oak in 1915, replacing the Jadike blacksmith shop at about the present location of Badger Cleaners.

Baraboo's downtown was not always as level as it is now, there being a rise in grade where the Al Ringling Theatre now stands, and low marshy areas in the 5<sup>th</sup> street area and near the library. The old building at 137 Third Avenue was also on high ground, and was lowered to sidewalk level 1919 by Frank Herfert, as well as receiving a new and modern front.

The new occupant was community leader Lauire C. Welch, operating as the Welch Plumbing and Heating business. In June of 1952, Welch was reported missing on a flight home from Spokane, WA. He piloted his own plane, a maroon Stinson, which may have foundered in the vicinity of Kalispel, MT.

The Welch establishment now became the Henry W. Roser Plumbing and Heating, and later the Baraboo Plumbing and Heating as operated by Wm. D. Bothel from 1972 to 1979. The storied career of the old building now took a different course in 1985, being

operated for a short time as the Fabric Store. This was followed by the Three Ring Hobbies store operated by Ed Steeb.

Richard Lanz operated his antiques business in the building until 1995, when the property was purchased by the Nordic Group. This fortunate acquisition resulted in a rather faithful restoration of the façade to the original appearance of the Headquarters Building of 1850. There is a modern interior which gives no hint of its many previous occupants, being now the offices of Viney and Viney Law office. As was indicated in the previous article, we are indebted to Joe Ward for his detailed and in depth knowledge of the history of the building.

Consider the changes seen by this building in its 150 years. Not yet invented was the typewriter, the telephone, nor electricity in all its forms and uses today. The automobile, the airplane, radio, and television were unknown. Yet to be built were a new brick courthouse, a city hall with tower, and the old red brick jail, all of which have come and gone while 137 Third Street stood its ground.

Fire ravaged the rest of downtown, and the two story brick façade buildings we see today are all youngsters in the view of the old Headquarters store building. There was no newspaper and no bank, and in fact Baraboo's downtown in 1850 bore almost no resemblance to today's picturesque Courthouse Square and the surrounding period style buildings.

The Big Boxes of old

We have already seen, in the previous article, that Baraboo's first store was not even locally owned. Many of the leading Baraboo industrialists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century were outsiders who came, saw the potential, and became residents and developer of the community.

What turmoil there must have been when, in 1929, it was learned that the big boxes of the day, called chain

stores, were coming to Baraboo in the form of a J.C. Penney department store! Despite dire predictions, the local establishments adjusted to the challenge. Baraboo was so attractive that to this day descendants of one of the managers, who was sent here as manager, remain as prominent and productive citizens of the community,

It is not known when the Sears store came, another big box of its day. Apparently it found early acceptance, for in 1961 the manager of the Sears store was also the Secretary of the Chamber of Commerce! Baraboo has many businesses today that are not locally owned. Note that three of the four banks are not locally owned, nor is the hospital, a St. Louis Mo. Corporation. This newspaper is not locally owned, and a glance through the yellow pages will reveal many more places owned by outsiders. In turn, some Baraboo businesses own stores or outlets elsewhere. This process is known as the capitalistic system.

This writer is an unabashed booster of Baraboo, but especially in regard to its growing position as a regional shopping center. We can no longer speak just of the "Baraboo Area", but should refer to Baraboo as the "Regional Shopping Center" of South Central Wisconsin. As such, we are a prime prospect for today's big box stores, such as Menards and Shopko or Kohls. At least it is better than stagnating and withering away as some Wisconsin towns are doing.

The old building at 137 Third Avenue, with its handsome new exterior restoration and modern interior, has had twelve tenants that we know of, and has often had to adjust to the times. It will continue to silently observe, with confidence, the ever-growing and ever-changing scene in the Gem City we call Baraboo.



Downtown Baraboo's  
Most Venerable Building  
Yesteryear Revisited  
By Bob Dewel

Which is the most venerable building in Downtown Baraboo? Which structure is not necessarily the most beautiful, but has historical import and dignity or character? Our tentative nomination is the Wright building on the Southeast corner of Oak and Fourth Street. It is known today as the Corner on Wisconsin

Venerable? Well, if for no other reason, it is the only building which has had a business with the word venerable in its title. Remember the Venerable Bean of the early 1990's? It was Baraboo's first coffee house, and was located in the Wright building.

Known to generations as the Reinking building, the structure was preceded on that location by the Western Hotel, Baraboo's leading hostelry of the mid-nineteenth century. The land had been a part of Prescott Brigham's 1846 gift "with his own money" of the section of land which became downtown Baraboo.

After the County took ownership, it sold off lots, and this corner was purchased in 1847 by Colonel Edward Sumner for his Adams House Hotel, which soon was enlarged and renamed the Western Hotel. A series of owners followed, but on November 6, 1878, one of Baraboo's disastrous fires destroyed it and all structures south to the corner of Oak and Third Street. An article on the Western Hotel will follow.

It did not take long for such valuable property to be reoccupied, and in 1881 the present building was erected by Elizabeth Wright of Baraboo at a cost of \$5500. We suspect that, due to inflation, the taxes are about that much per year!

Mrs. Wright must have been a shrewd investor, for the new building

could accommodate four businesses. As can be seen by the accompanying drawing, the Post Office occupied the corner bay, now the north half of the Corner on Wisconsin. The center bay was occupied by the R. Jackson grocery, with the present location of the Garden Party Café occupied by long-time clothier J. Hoppe. In the basement in 1891 was A. C. White's Tonsorial Parlor. In 1895 Holden's barber shop occupied the small room at the rear facing Fourth Street, followed by Ibe's Tailor Shop.

According to downtown research expert Joe Ward, the Devils Lake Cliff House Hotel owner W.P. Pearl planned to convert the two North bays into a hotel, with a dining room. The kitchen would occupy the bay occupied by the Tailor. These plans never materialized, and in 1897 the Baraboo Music Store took over the North bay, selling Fisher pianos.

The purchase of the property in 1899 by August Reinking brought nearly a century of stability to the building. Reinking had already been operating a store in various locations in downtown Baraboo, having arrived in the city in 1879. In the new location, the partition between the North and center bays was removed for the Reinking dry goods store, with the South bay occupied by a jewelry store, and later by Vethe Music.

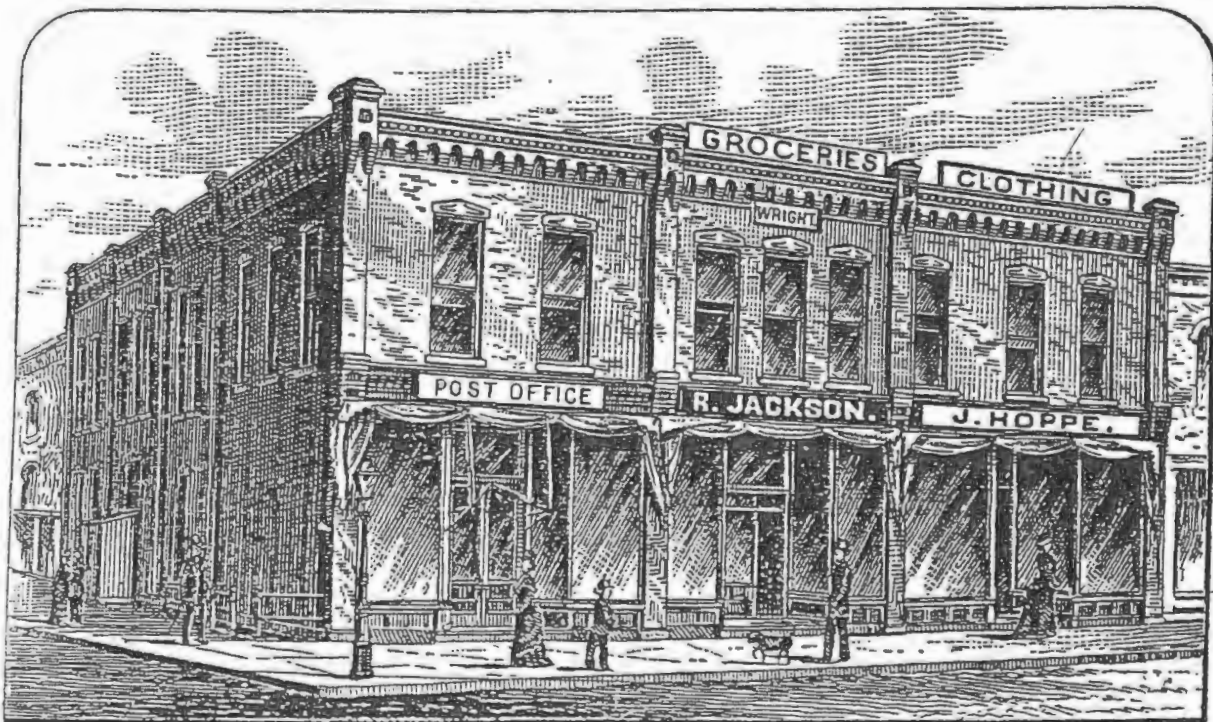
In 1901 Reinking's son Autie returned, having graduated from dental school, and it is believed he added the second floor bay window projection near the corner as part of a dental office. Business pressure, however, resulted in his assuming active participation in the store, and he never practiced dentistry, it is said. The space upstairs was used by the Ringlings for wardrobe production.

A fire on January 24, 1929, gutted much of the interior, which was rebuilt in what was then considered the most modern way to operate a large store. A system of cables or vacuum tubes passed from sales desks to a central cashier on a raised platform,

where change was made or charges entered. In post war and post-Vietnam America, this system was considered archaic, and the Reinking store was often visited by younger persons just to see the unusual communications system.

The Reinking store was closed in the early 1990's after a few years operation by Dennis and Mary Thurow, she being a Reinking descendant. After a short period, it was occupied for a time by a men's clothing store. Following this, the short-lived but memorable Venerable Bean coffee house occupied the property for a year or so.

Today, the venerable building houses not only the Corner on Wisconsin and the Garden Party Cafe, but several shops upstairs, complete with an elevator to bypass the daunting flight of stairs. It still dominates one of the two busiest corners in downtown Baraboo, a dominance it once shared with the massive Warren Hotel diagonally across the street. Mrs. Wright made a good contribution to downtown Baraboo in 1881, 122 years ago.



CORNER OF OAK AND FOURTH STREETS.

## Part Two, Baraboo Hotels Come and Go Yesteryear Revisited By Bob Dewel

As reported in the previous article, Baraboo had up to a dozen hotels after the arrival of the railroad in 1871, not including the resort hotels at Devils Lake. It was apparent to the editor of the Baraboo Republic in 1877, however, that none of the establishments measured up to the standard required by the growing city. Even the venerable Western Hotel was called an eyesore.

The Business Association formed a movement to promote erection of a good hotel, and the result was the Sumner House. It was a 60 times 66 foot structure constructed on the Northwest corner of Oak and Fourth Avenue, and opened in September, 1878. With only 17 rooms, it was partially destroyed by fire on January 11, 1882.

### The Warren Hotel

By 1884, the newspaper announced that Mayor Warren was going to enlarge the Sumner house, add a third story, and rename it the Warren House. The addition would bring its capacity to 40 rooms, with dining room and reading room. The paper said that, upon completion, the hotel would soon "rank with the leading hotels of the state".

For some 80 years the Warren Hotel did indeed set the standard, at least for south central Wisconsin. The impressive sandstone block façade was comparable to that of the present Cornerstone Gallery building, 101 Fourth Street, though the Warren was a much larger building. One could choose to dine in the dining room, the barroom with its Chinese cook and Chinese cuisine, or attend a dinner party in the Pine Room in the lower level. The latter was temporarily renamed the Bomb Shelter during the Powder Plant days of WW II.

The loss of the Warren House to fire was a severe blow to Baraboo, leaving it without a downtown hotel. For a few years the sturdy sandstone walls belied the inner devastation, but it was not feasible to rebuild, and Wilbur Deppe finally had the remains removed and replaced with a modern one story business mall. Rumor now has it that downtown Baraboo will soon have a hotel built nearby, Hopefully this will happen.

### Other hotels

It seems that 1894 was a seminal year in Baraboo, for another hotel was built that year, named the Bender, on the Northeast corner of Lynn and Walnut. Its 20 rooms were more of a boarding house, and its proximity to the railroad made it a popular establishment. President Hayes is said to have left the train and dined there. In 1879 the frame building was replaced with a more substantial brick structure. In recent years it was known as Dombroski's bar, and now has been remodeled, well after a fire, into the Old Baraboo Inn restaurant.

Another downtown hotel was the Wisconsin House, a two story frame building. Erected in the 1850's, it served until about 1912 when it was removed in preparation for the construction of the Al. Ringling Theatre. It is said that the vacant land was used in 1913 and 1914 for outdoor movies. A separate article will discuss this hotel.

Of interest is the building at 123 Ash. The wood frame City Hotel once was located here, replaced in 1888 by George Urban with the brick veneer two story Urban hotel, complete with dining room and saloon as well as hotel rooms.

Diagonally across the street was once another City Hotel, at 200 Ash Street, built about 1890, and which operated until 1930. Later it became Wilder's Big Top Tavern, including a rooming house. It has recently been handsomely remodeled into apartments. Other hotels in Baraboo were the Premo House, the Pratt House, and the Exchange Hotel.

One building still extant today is the former Wellington Hotel at 144 Fourth Avenue, built in 1890 and now occupied since 1970 by law and optical offices. Still referred to as the Wellington hotel building, it once was renamed the Windsor hotel, and at one time was also known as the Musicale. Except for the lower level, the façade remains as pictured in early photos.

Much of the material in this article is taken from the Baraboo Extensive Survey, a 1989 publication produced by the State Historical Society. We have no reason to doubt its accuracy, but caution that most historical material is subject to continual updating and correction.



Above, The Warren Hotel



Left, the Wellington Hotel building, 2003

Honored Building has  
Checkered Past  
Yesteryear Revisited  
By Bob Dewel

You'd never guess it, from the sparkling white early American façade, but the building at 137 3<sup>rd</sup> Avenue, the Viney Law Offices, is the oldest building on the square. By some miracle it survived the many fires that plagued the city in the 1870-80 period. Those old wood structures were probably good riddance, making way for the substantial two story brick front edifices we see today in downtown Baraboo.

One such fire burned most of the first block of Fourth Street, and among the first to be replaced was the small but sturdy structure at 101 Fourth Street occupied today by the Cornerstone Gallery. Because of the quality and historical significance of this Italianate Romanesque building, it has been placed on the National Register of Historic Places.

#### Early History

This article discusses in detail the checkered past of this small but prominent edifice, which was once owned by this writer. We did an in-depth study of its history, and a small booklet was prepared. It has now proven to be of value since the original abstract has been lost. Briefly, this dignified corner has been host to meat markets, a saloon, various professional offices, a bank, a candy kitchen—but we get ahead of the story!

In the early days all of the western lands of the new American Republic were listed originally as the property of the state. This was not communism. It was simply a way to make an orderly transfer of the territories into private hands, and so it was with the history of the plot of ground at 101 Fourth Street.

The first transfer of ownership was from the United States to Sauk County,

on August 1, 1848. This was certainly part of the land purchased "with his own money" by Prescott Brigham of Sumpter Township, and donated to the newly formed county with its empty treasury. This story had been covered in depth in other articles. The land was subsequently sold off by the county, except for the courthouse square, and the first purchaser of this corner was one Ezra Benton, who paid \$42.50. Benton made money, for in 1853 he sold it for \$250 to James Arden, but Arden sold it in three months for \$500, doubling his money.

#### Fire

Apparently the new owner, for a time, was the redoubtable Baraboo pioneer woman, Roseline Peck, whose ownership lasted until 1870, when it brought \$780. We read in Butterfield, page 527, that "on the night of Nov. 26, 1872, a fire broke out in the (frame building at this location) occupied by Charles Sears as a meat market. The flames could not be checked, and when they had spent their fury seven buildings were in ashes. The losses included: Building, corner Oak and Fourth owned by Levi Crouch and occupied by Frank McGinnis, loss \$1000..."

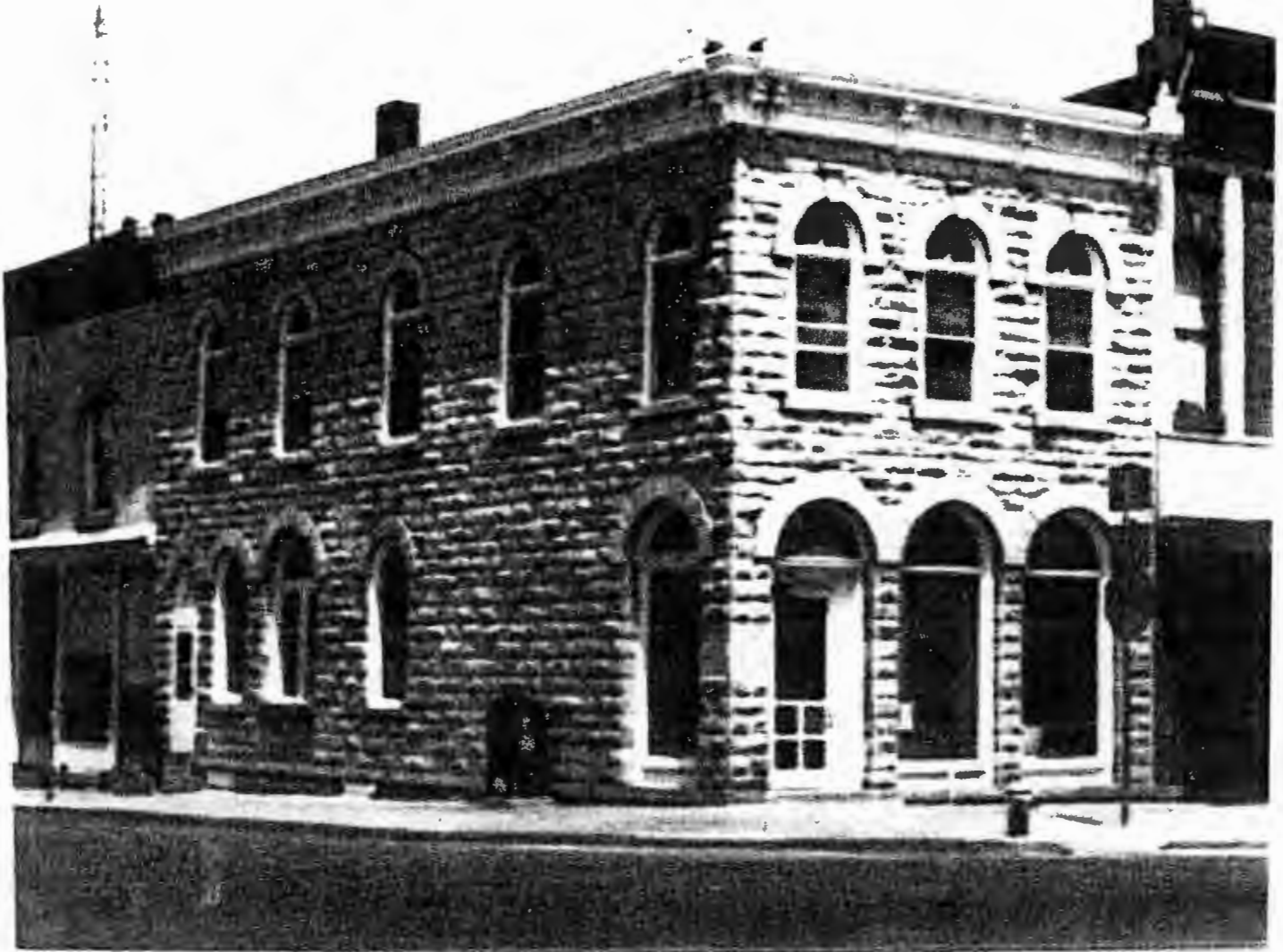
Now, nothing against meat markets, but they do not ordinarily build Italianate Romanesque structures to house their business. The speculation is that a group of aspiring entrepreneurs got together, built the building, and failed to follow through on the bank project. It seems to have been sold to the Gust Brothers meat market, which, in two years sold it to S.S. Grubb at a profit of \$550, not bad in those days.

#### A bank at

last

At last, in 1888, the building gets its dignity, at least for a time, for Frank Brewster buys it, then sells it the following year to the new Baraboo Savings Bank, making \$750 on the deal. This happy state was to last only until 1897, when the bank apparently went under and





the building was purchased by Anna W. Evans.

A parallel set of entries in the abstract shows additional land being added to or removed from the property, featuring such prominent Baraboo names of that day as Mertons, Bender, Udell, Crouch, and Charles Wild. Wild was mayor in 1892-93, and got bridges and the first paved street for Baraboo during his term.

During the Evans ownership the building housed such diverse enterprises as an attorney office, a candy kitchen and some sort of magnetic healing business. Old timer Frank Larkin told me he remembers seeing an abstractor's sign in the window in 1910. A barber is said to have occupied the north room of the building.

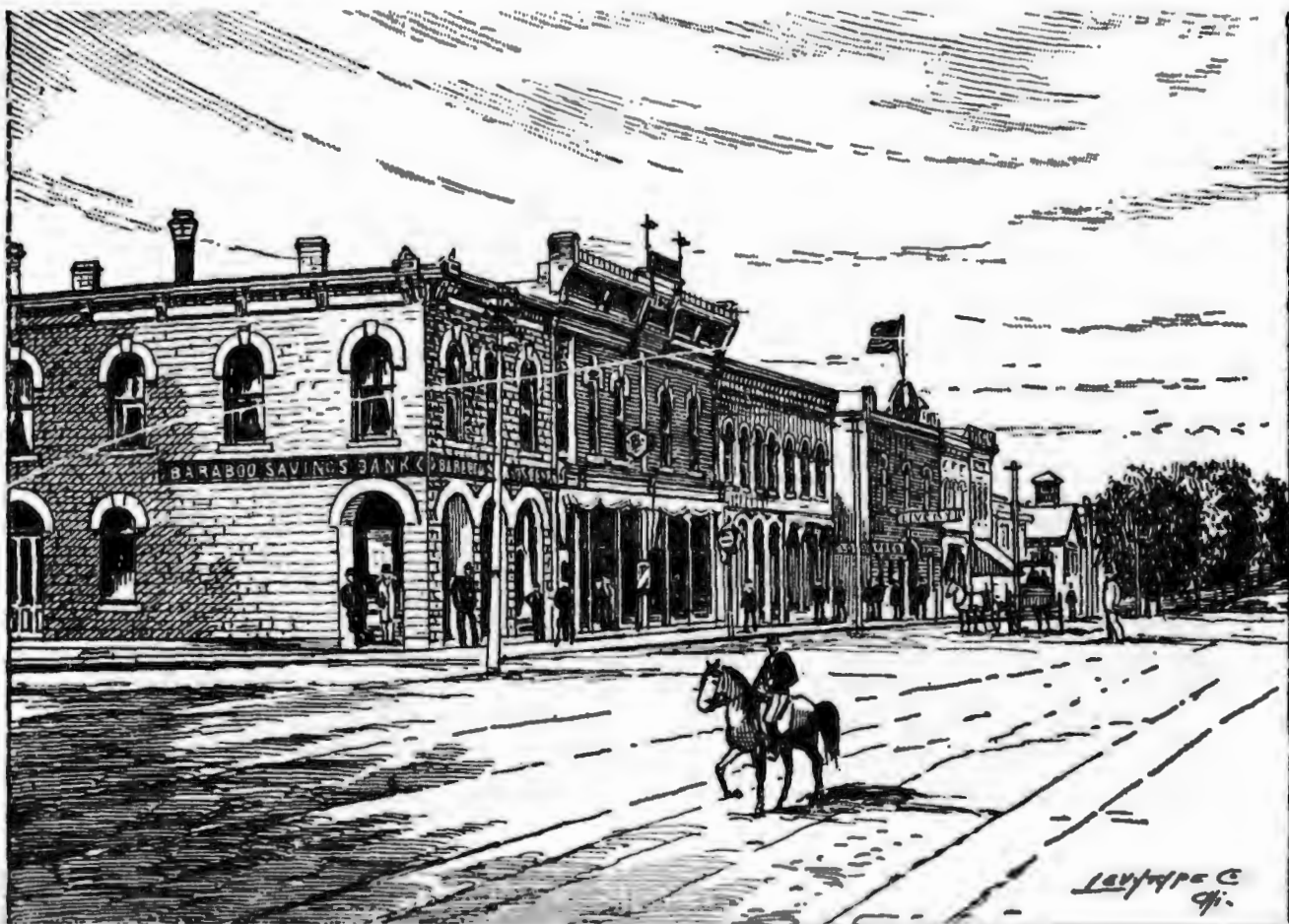
The structure returned to its original purpose in 1917 with the organization of the Farmers and Merchants Bank, one of whose organizers was B.E. Trimpey. This bank merged with the First National Bank in 1929, the contract specifying that the F and M building could not be used for a competing bank for 50 years! There was indeed, in 1970, a short-lived movement to form a bank in about 1970, but it fizzled.

With the departure of the F and M bank in 1928 and the advent of hard times, the building fell into the doldrums of the depression. The 1935 city directory indeed shows it to be the home of the Square Tavern, well remembered by old timers. It is said that the north room, with its side entrance,



Downtown Baraboo, about 1880, looking west on Fourth Street.

SOMETIME BEFORE 1886



was for the ladies to make a discreet entrance. During Prohibition, Attorney (later Judge) Robert Gollmar was once unable to enter his upstairs offices due to a raid on the tavern by a federal prohibition squad.

#### Professional Offices

A new era began in 1936 with the sale of the building to Dr. John Moon, the colorful and straight-talking physician about town. Moon did extensive remodeling on both floors, the lower being his medical office and the upper floor a nice two bedroom apartment with lots of storage space. When Dr. Moon retired, he leased the office and practice to Dr. John Siebert, who occupied it until about 1964 when he built what is now the Davis-Duehr eye clinic near the hospital. After two empty years, the structure was purchased by this writer for his dental practice, where he remained for twenty years. We had the grime on the building sandblasted away, revealing a nice gray stone.

With my retirement in 1985, Dr. Robert Konen practiced dentistry there for 5, years. followed by Dr. Wm Wenzel, Chiropractor, for three years. In 1993 Nancy Dillman and Fred Mohs purchased the building, and did extensive interior remodeling, producing a very attractive quality gift and art display, known as the Cornerstone Gallery.

In testimony to the 19<sup>th</sup> century architects, the exterior of this building has hardly changed despite the plethora of occupants, qualifying it for the National Register of Historic places. Through all its occupants, the building has retained its aura of dignity and respectability, acting as a small but sturdy bookend for the larger and taller structure to the east. They built well in those days.

## Four Generations in the Furniture Business Yesterday Revisited By Bob Dewel

Which is the oldest business firm in Baraboo? The Corner Drug Store traces its beginning to 1855, apparently using the same name. Vying for the honor, however, is this newspaper, founded as the Baraboo Republic in 1855. Another claimant is the Baraboo National Bank, founded in 1857 as the Sauk County Bank. Baraboo was a young and rambunctious boom town in those days

If you considered organizations in continuous existence, the First United Methodists trace their existence to 1842, and were the first church group organized in Baraboo. The Masonic Order dates from 1851, predating the Corner Drug, the bank and the newspaper. Both the Inter Se and the Fortnightly Club can trace meeting dates into the late 1800's. County government began in 1846, and West Baraboo was incorporated as Lyons well before Baraboo sought incorporation.

### Furniture Stores

As far as businesses go, neither the Corner Drug nor the Bank can claim four generations of family ownership, but there is one firm that can—the McGann Furniture Store. They could be celebrating their centennial soon, though the exact date is shrouded in mystery. Downtown historian Joe Ward puts the beginning of the McGann ownership at "sometime prior to 1905"

The furniture store, however, outdates the McGann ownership by some 30 years, for in April of 1873 Carlos Bacon purchased the already existing furniture establishment of Baldwin and Hirschinger, and renamed it the Peoples Furniture Store, adding Henry R. Ryan as a partner in November. It was located in one of Baraboo's first buildings of any consequence, the Taylor's Hall building

on the SE corner of Broadway and Third Avenue. In 1882, however, new owner William Slade moved the store to his newly erected building at 145 Third Street. This building is currently occupied by Community Home Medical.

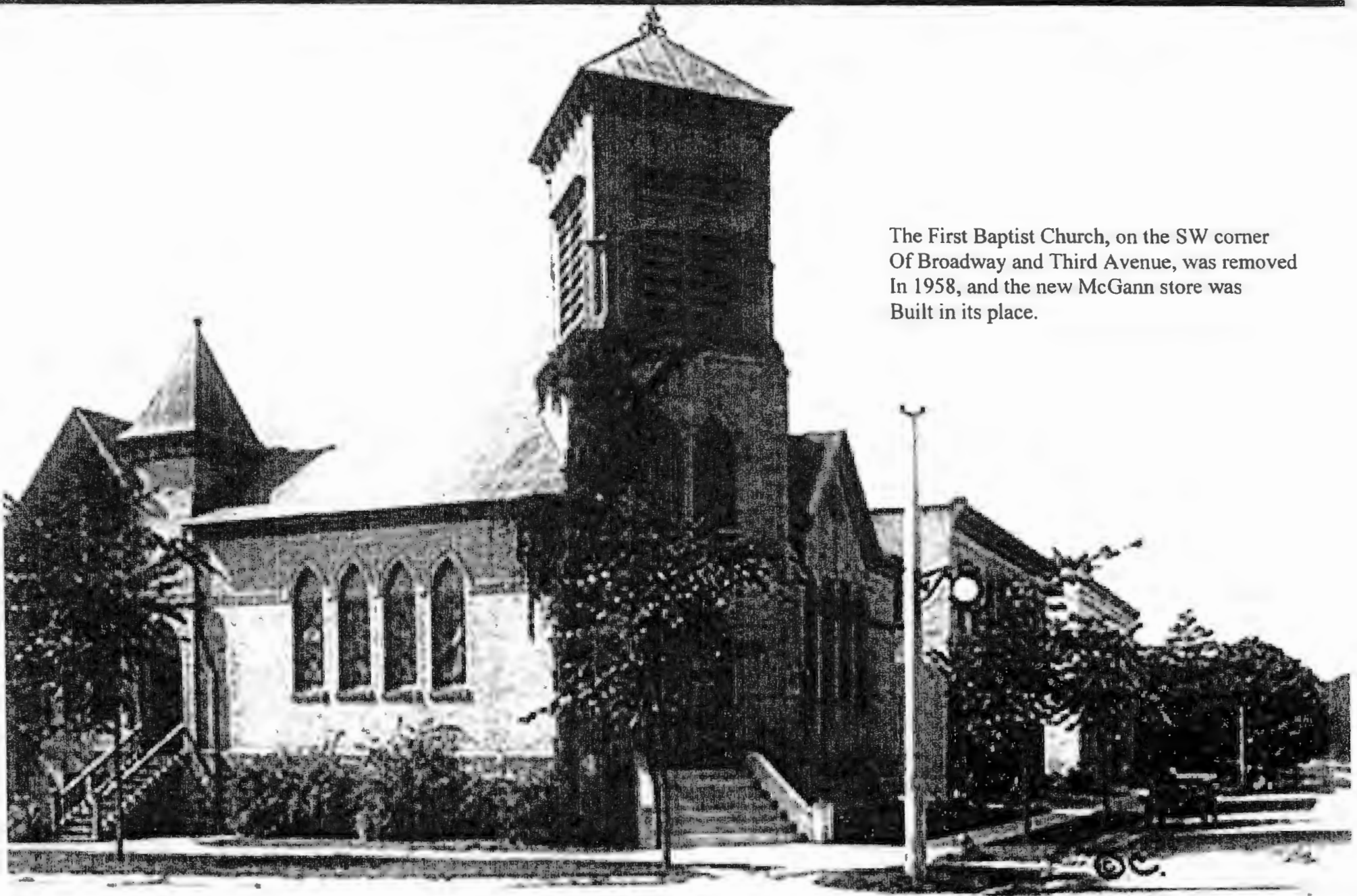
### The McGanns

In a report far too detailed than can be presented in a newspaper article, Ward then turns to the story of John McGann, who at about the age of 20 established a business in Baraboo in cooperation with his brother in law, James R. Curry, it being a coal and ice business. They seem to have been in business in the mid-1880's, but from 1890 to 1892 McGann was in Butte, Montana.

Meantime Carlos Bacon, the furniture store man, became in 1889 vice-president of the new First National Bank of that day, organized in 1886. Apparently he found his banking duties more remunerative than those of his furniture store, which he sold in early 1891 to a couple of newcomers from Ohio, which business now became known as Welch and Erswell, Furniture Dealers, Undertakes, and Embalmers.

Apparently the new business failed, but there is some confusion as to a time gap here. Meantime, Edward Erswell, Charles Melzel, and John McGann (mentioned above) established a new firm, with the name—no surprise—Erswell, Melzel, and McGann, Furniture and Undertaking. This, sometime before 1905, became the beginning of the McGann family ownership, which has lasted about a century.

Meantime, as reported in another article, the Masonic Lodge had in 1892 dedicated their new Temple on the NW corner of Oak and Second Streets. The Lodge retained the upper floor for their use, but rented out the spacious lower level to a variety of businesses, including for a time the post office. In 1906 the post office moved to its new building across the street south, currently the offices of the Baraboo School District.



The First Baptist Church, on the SW corner Of Broadway and Third Avenue, was removed In 1958, and the new McGann store was Built in its place.

First Baptist Church

Following the departure of the post office from part of the lower floor, the entire space was occupied in 1906 by the now thriving Erswell, Melzel, and McGann enterprise. There appears to have been a split in ownership in 1912, for Erswell has a competing store at 129 Third Avenue, occupied now in 2004 by Ploetz Furniture.

Melzel and McGann continued in the combined furniture and embalming business, and purchased a fine new auto hearse in 1916 to replace horse-drawn wagons used in the past. With the death of Charles Melzel in 1929, John McGann became sole owner of the business which traced its beginning back to 1873, as related above.

#### Jack McGann

John McGann had a son by the same name, but nicknamed Jack. He graduated from a Chicago embalming school in 1934 and associated himself, along with his brother Louis, in the McGann store. Within months, however, John found himself, along with his brother and Mother, the owner of the business, for John McGann Sr. had died while in consultation at the Mayo Clinic.

In 1941, they opened a funeral home at 520 East Street, later sold to Les Hanson and now known as the Rago Funeral Home. Ed Kurtz joined the firm in 1951, which for a time was known as McGann-Kurtz Furniture. Disaster had struck in 1957, with a total loss due to fire, as reported in a previous article.

Thanks to Royce Cushman, a fellow Barbershop Quartet member with McGann, they were back in business in three days at 112 Fifth Avenue. The First Baptist Church building on the corner of Broadway and Third Avenue had been purchased just before the fire. Thanks to rapid demolition and construction, the firm moved to its new location in nine months. They have since expanded into neighboring buildings.

Recent years have seen the continuation of McGann family members participating in the business, and do not require extensive review at

this time. The third generation of McGanns was represented by the arrival of James McGann into the partnership in 1964, and in 1983 Casey McGann, a present co-owner, became the fourth McGann family member to operate the business. Thus the family can trace ownership, full or partial, for a century, although an exact date of the first ownership is not known for sure.

Historians of small cities are often struck by the comings and goings of families over the years. Americans are a restless lot, and only rarely do you find several generations of a family remaining in the same locality. Predating even the McGanns are such families as the Pointons, who first made an appearance in Baraboo before the Civil War. This writer would be interested in hearing from others whose families have been in the area continuously from before 1865.

# When A Cannon Started Races at Devils Lake

## Tales of Other Days

By Bob Dewel

Devils Lake today is a tranquil refuge from the noise and commercialism of our area. Its waters are gently rippled only by sailboats and other slow-moving boats. Sometimes the shrill cry of a sea gull is the only sound to skirl the air.

It was not so tranquil for our forbearers, however, especially in the summer of 1877. Note the crowd in the attached picture, and also the cannon. Its boom will certainly reverberate from cliff to cliff. What is going on?

### The Lake in 1877

First, Lets set the scene. There is no state park in 1877 and no rangers or campgrounds. All of the land is privately owned, down to the water's edge, and at least three hotels and other accommodations dot the shoreline. Well over a dozen trains huff and puff their way on the rather new Northwestern rail line, fouling the air with soot and the stench of their smoke. Some trains stop, disgorging up to 1500 passengers to spend the day—or a week—at the lake. A steamboat churns and whistles its way along the shore line.

It's not exactly the ecological and geological paradise we enjoy today, a biological microcosm of the past in a mountain-like setting. Fortunately the forested areas away from the lake were pretty much undisturbed in those early years. The majestic lake and the bluffs which guard it were threatened, however, by commercial quarry operations next to the railroad on the East Bluff. It would be thirty years before a determined state legislature forced removal of the quarry operation away from the lake and around to the south face of the East Bluff, as related in previous articles (Book V, 28-32).

### Plans for two days

The event which featured the cannon was indeed an unusual time for Baraboo and Devils Lake. A regatta was planned for June 20 and 21, with entries from St. Paul, Chicago, and Milwaukee, consisting of single, two-man and four-man racing sculls. There would be eleven different races, a mile each direction for most. Considerable interest was shown throughout the Midwest, with reporters from Minneapolis, Chicago, La Crosse, and Waukesha in attendance. The Northwestern Railroad announced special fares, 60% of the normal ticket price.

The La Crosse Sun opined that "there is more interest in a race of rowboats, manned by stalwart men, than in a horse race or a church raffle." The St. Paul Pioneer Press said that the St. Paul oarsmen had their boat constructed in New York, and that it was "the finest and handsomest four-oared paper shell...forty-one feet in length and eighteen inches in width, and is supplied with sliding seats."

Travelers were assured that the Devils Lake hotels, namely the Cliff House, the Kirkland, and the Fountain House, augmented by those in Baraboo, could supply ample accommodations. The old Taylor's Hall building on the Southeast corner of Broadway and Third was converted for dormitory use, with an ample supply of cots and "shakedown" the latter type of accommodation being unexplained.

Both the Western and Wisconsin House hotels in Baraboo were arranging extra accommodations, with "good stabling attached (for the horses), and have filled their bins and lofts with food." At the lake, the Kirkland Hotel planned to feature wines from its own vineyard, and the Devils Lake hotels promised to "make prices as moderate as the service rendered will admit." The La Crosse paper stated that meals, by law, could cost no more than three shillings at the event.



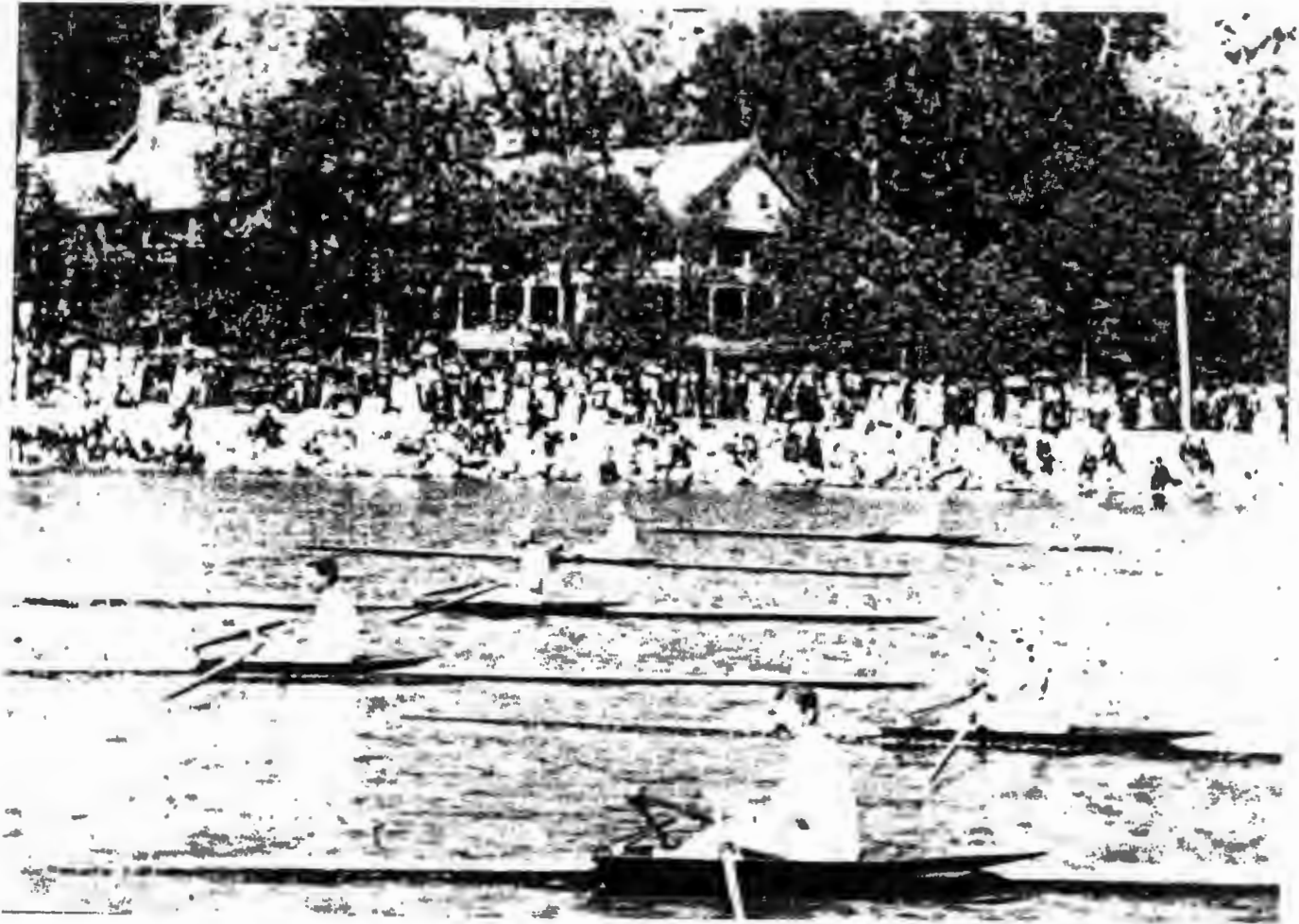
#### The Participants

The Minneapolis rowing club arrived a week early to familiarize themselves with the water. The Chicago rowers arrived the next day, "in order that others shall not gain too much advantage over them from familiarity with the water." In Chicago, J.W. Mayo, the jeweler, wrote that "the medals are now completed and on exhibition and that they make a fine display. They are better than originally contemplated, being generally heavier, in solid gold and silver, than he had estimated." How funds for these and the cash prizes were raised is not mentioned in the newspaper.

In Baraboo the Republic reported that 2,400 tickets to the lake were sold at the railroad ticket office, and it is estimated that half that number also went out by private conveyance", which in those days meant riding a horse or riding in a carriage or wagon. The Republic also reported that visitors were surprised that Baraboo had two bands playing at the event, the Spirit Lake Band the Bon Ton Band.

One of the participants was Tom Thompson of the Minnewaukan Club of





Baraboo. The Republic reported that Thompson "rowed in a butternut boat, weighing thirty five pounds, made by himself. "He took up rowing recently...lacks experience and the advantage of seeing sculling in the hands of experts. " His boat was described as a "very handsome piece of work...he uses a stationary seat, which diminishes the freedom of his stroke."

We have used an entire article to set the scene for this event, due to the great scope of the planning in relation to the times and the relatively small size of the village of Baraboo at the time. Could the park handle an event like that today, with everyone coming by car instead of by train—the parking alone would be a nightmare. We are pretty impressed with the organizational skills of the folks of that time, and the next article will tell of the races and associated events, including the intrusion of Chicago gamblers.



Sauk County Historical Society

The Lake View Hotel at Devils Lake was considered the height of vacation elegance, though Mrs. Lincoln did not think so and moved into town, it is said.

## Regatta Day in June 1877, Part II

### Tales of Other Days

By Bob Dewel

Today is an anniversary of sorts, a 129<sup>th</sup> anniversary no less. As was described in our article of two weeks ago, thousands of persons from the Midwest had converged on Devils Lake on June 20, 1877, for a skull racing event. To the consternation of the committee, however, that day was a rainy and blustery day, unfit for scull racing on the rough waters of Devils Lake.

Therefore it was announced that the races would be postponed to the next day, Thursday, June 21, 1877. To add to the executive committee's frustration, the skies cleared nicely later in the day, but it was too late to restart the event.

Thursday the 21<sup>st</sup> was sunny, however, with a cool breeze, and the "programme" began, with complete reporting of results by the Republic. It stated that "our streets were crowded with teams and people in countless numbers; excursion trains from the east brought thousands more...variously counted from 8000 to 5000." The Republic noted that "a clear day and a cooling breeze put everybody in good humor, and those that were disappointed the previous day rallied to the scene among the foremost."

#### The First Day's events

The racing course went from near the Cliff House Hotel to a marker a mile distant, near the head of the lake. Curiously, the cannon pictured in the last article is not mentioned, but must have been used to start the races. The oarsmen represented seven clubs, the Mitchell (Milwaukee), the Riverdale rowing club, Niles Rowing Club (Michigan), Northwestern Rowing association, the Minnesota (St. Paul), and the Farragut (Chicago), and of course the Minnewukan Club of Baraboo. "all having brought single or double sculls, or four oared sculls, with them."

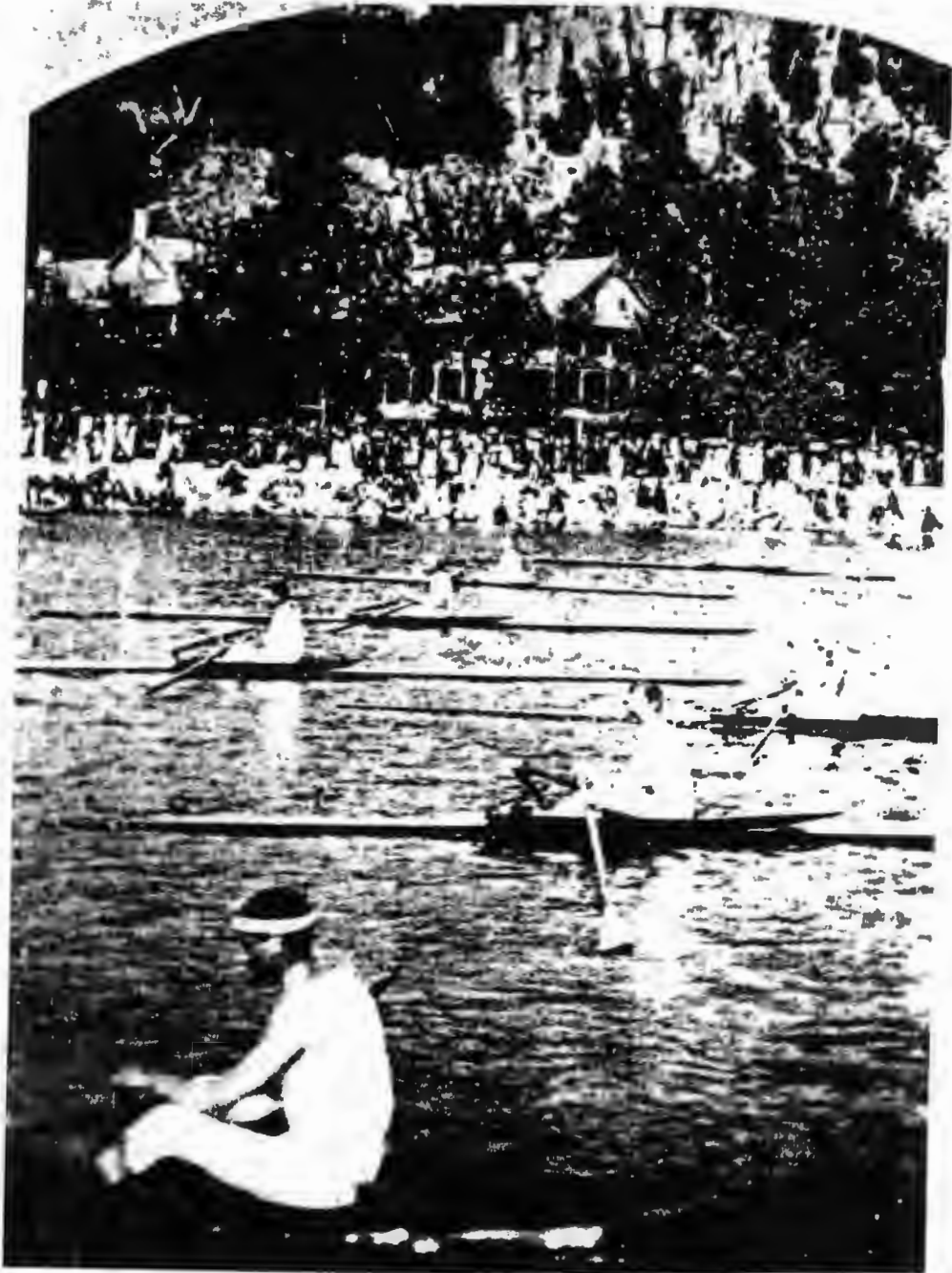
#### The First Day's Events

In the first race, the Minnesota rower dropped out, "frightened of the rough water and unable to swim." The other St. Paul rower "stove a hole in his boat," slowing him down. The Niles Michigan rower won, with Tom Thompson of Baraboo a close second, covering the mile in 16:30 minutes. The winner received a prize of \$50, not an insignificant sum in those days, with perhaps buying power of near \$1000 today.

The second race was for common boats. The newspaper reports are fuzzy, but the prize was only "two \$5 greenbacks" as they were called in those days. Only three double sculls were involved in the third race, but the Republic reported that "some fine work was done in this race". The newspaper also dutifully reported the number of strokes per minute for each scull, ranging from 34 to 38.

There was almost a photo finish for this race, the winner completing the race of two miles in 11:32 minutes. The Fourth race was for single sculls, represented by Thompson of Baraboo with his homemade butternut boat. One boat was in the lead until "the waves broke in his deck" and another boat came in first, with Baraboo's Thompson second. The final race of the day featured four-oared shells, with four medals valued at \$30 each, but only three shells entered. Thompson did well considering that someone had stepped into his boat earlier and "stove a hole in it," requiring emergency repairs.

Awards for the day were announced from the balcony of the Cliff House, after a few remarks by Capt. Cowles, He was accompanied by a committee of young ladies from Chicago, New Your, and Baraboo. The latter included such well known names in Baraboo history as Marie Gattiker, Della Draper, Ella Pointon, Laura Cowles, Carrie Butler, Ada Ryan, (?) Drown, and also "Master Myers, who won the goose race."



#### The Second Racing day

On Friday "the weather was more propitious, and the water exceedingly quiet," with at least 3600 onlookers in attendance. We will not attempt to describe each race in detail, but note that the first was for double sculls (awards were two \$25 medals), while the next was for common boats, no prize mentioned. Next came four-oared sculls, followed by a 100 yard swimming race with a \$20 medal. Next came a single scull race, and the festivities concluded with a 50 yard tub race, the tubs being "of medium size... All but two went to the bottom." In a curious ad, Mr. H. L. Gray wrote "I want to rent for the regatta, to be delivered to the lake on the afternoon of June 21<sup>st</sup>, 1 dozen full grown geese, for which a liberal price will be given."

### The steamboat

The Republic makes no mention of it, but it is likely that the steamship Minnewauken had the busiest days of its career on Devils Lake during the races. We have not found a picture of the Minnewauken, but it replaced the Capitola, pictured with this article. The Capitola was launched in 1869, and served for five years. General U.S. Grant is reported to have been a passenger sometime during its days on the lake. It is said that the boat was at times "used for midnight concerts by musicians playing from the middle of the lake," as reported in the recent Sauk County Historical Museum's recent publication, "Images of America—Baraboo." That musical feature has been resurrected in the recent years by Jerry Stich and his musicians, but not at midnight that we know of!

The old newspapers are interesting to read. On the same page as the regatta reports is a notice to a large number of residents requiring them to install sidewalks on their property. On July 18, 1877, "There will be a school meeting...to consider the matter of organizing a high school for the city!" Also announced by the Baraboo Ball Club was "our first reception...At our first game we will appear in 'full dress'." A very brief mention is made of the plans of Col. Sumner to build a hotel—it became the landmark Warren Hotel, which burned in the 1960's some 80 year later.

As might be expected, Chicago gamblers "reaped a fine harvest during the day", but were hauled into court that evening and fined a modest \$75. The paper expressed outrage at their presence. I guess we can't say that life was too dull in 1877, with multi-state racing on the lake, uniformed baseball club players, and midnight serenades from a boat on the lake—and gamblers. And yes, a controversy about sidewalks.

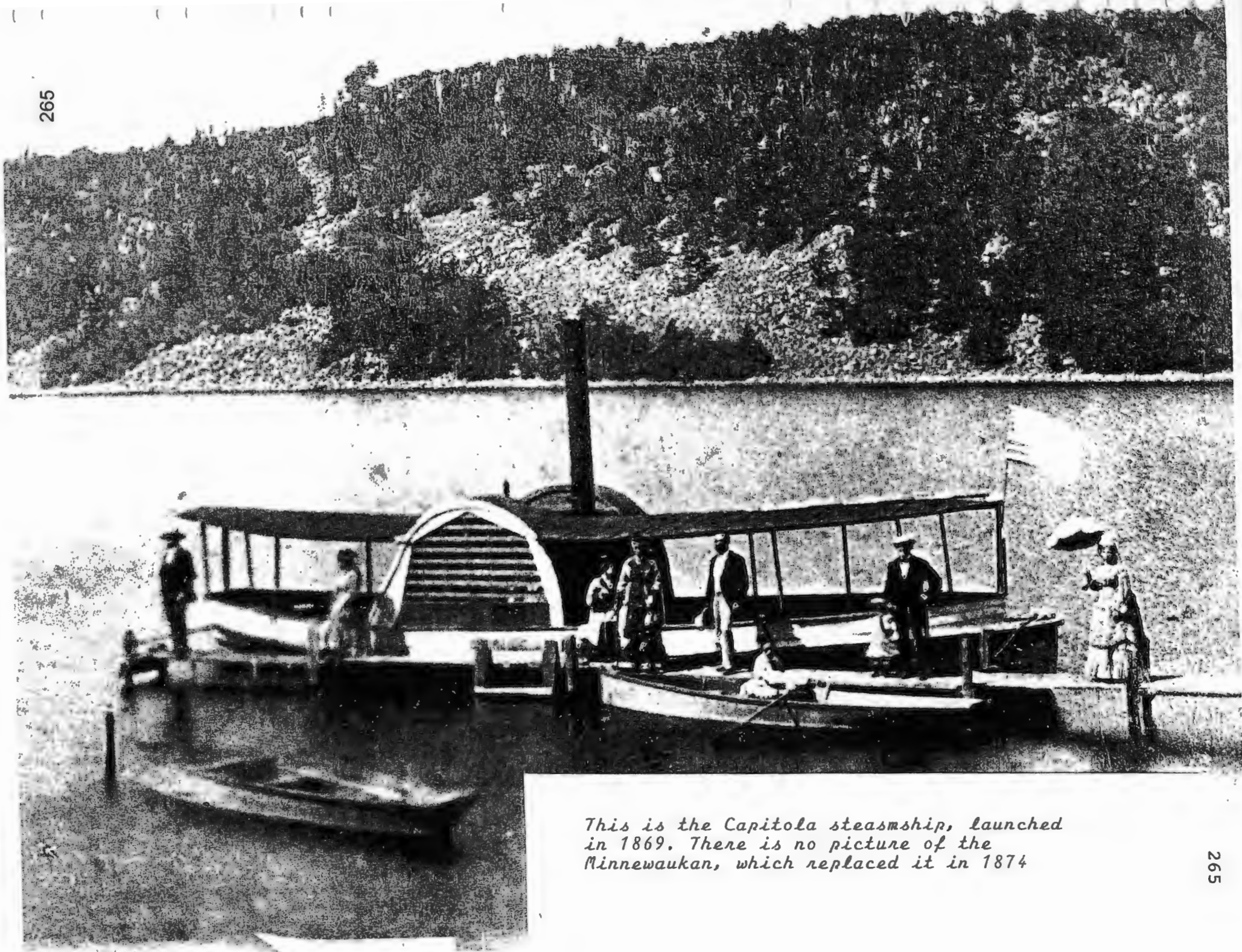
We regret to chronicle an injury to the fine shell-boat recently finished by Mr. Chas. Thompson. While the boat was tied to one of the docks at the lake, during the temporary absence of the owner, a person apparently unacquainted with its frail construction stepped into it with the effect to stove a hole through the bottom. The boat will of course have to be repaired by putting in an entirely new section amidships.

### Business Notices.

I want to rent for the regatta, to be delivered at the Lake on the afternoon of June 21st, 1 dozen full grown Geese, for which a liberal price will be paid.

911

H. L. GRAY.



*This is the Capitola steasmship, launched in 1869. There is no picture of the Minnewaukan, which replaced it in 1874*

*Tales for the Sesquicentennial*

# The bridges of Baraboo

## (or, they don't make bridges like that anymore)

by Bob Dewel

In this article, each of the bridges shown is discussed in the text accompanying the picture. Not shown are the McArthur dam area bridge on highway 113, and the Highway 12 bridge west of town. Many of the postcard pictures are from the collection of Baraboo barber John McNabb.

The Highway 12 bridge was our first bypass, cutting the downtown businesses off from previous traffic on Highway

12 via the High bridge, and later via the Broadway bridge. Congestion was not a big factor then, and Baraboo businessmen fought the bypass at the time, without success.

Now it is proposed that the old bypass on Highway 12 be bypassed by a super highway west of West Baraboo. The reason seems to be possible congestion in the West Baraboo business area, so history is in a way repeating itself. Should the new bypass go through, we'll have still another bridge over the Baraboo river. Despite all the bypasses, Baraboo continues to thrive.

Possibly the worst congestion on Highway 12 between the Twin Cities and Chicago is the "strip" at Lake Delton, but there appears to be no move to bypass that serious bottleneck.

With regard to Baraboo bridges, there are six vehicle and two footbridges in the immediate Baraboo area. Thankfully, there is no indication that a powerful state agency or special interest groups would want the bridges removed so as to return the river to some pre-selected mythical date in its history.

### Baraboo's first bridge

The first bridge in Baraboo was a covered bridge at the present location of the Ash-Walnut street bridge. Goc, in "Many a Fine Harvest," dates it as being constructed in the early 1870s.

In this view, probably looking northwest, the scaffolding for the bridge is in place, made no doubt with lumber milled in Baraboo. The 1855 Bassett Mill, mentioned and pictured in a previous article, is in the background. The Catholic church has not yet been erected.

The present bridge at this location was only recently erected, and is probably the fourth bridge to span the river there.



### Woolen Mill Bridge

This postcard view is titled "The New Bridge over the Baraboo River," and the postmark dates it from before 1920. In the background is West Baraboo, but the Woolen Mill Dam at the head of the Baraboo Rapids does not show, since the river is flowing to the right. It would be just beyond the bridge.

The graceful and classic bridge was removed at the same time as the difficult destruction of the dam, purportedly designed by Frank Lloyd Wright and pictured in a previous article. This bridge was replaced by a no-nonsense (and no-style?) bridge about 30 years ago.

The floating apparatus in the foreground prevented river debris from entering the mill-race and clogging up the power-producing mechanism.

When this connection to West Baraboo was bridged is not known, but an illustrated



## Waterworks & Manchester Street Bridge

The postmark on this postcard dates it as 1911, though the picture could have been taken much earlier. This idyllic scene is of the waterworks area, with the placid millrace in the foreground.

To the far left the Manchester Street bridge can be seen, and this bridge was moved a few years ago from the waterworks area to the present Oschner Park location, where it is a footbridge.



The roads in the scene are gravel, and the entire area appears to be well-kept. The millrace, of course, was water diverted from the river by the waterworks dam, now being destroyed as we write. The race supplied water power for the pumping station and later to produce electricity.

## Broadway Bridge

This is the present Broadway bridge, with the railroad underpass in view at the right edge of the photo. Though more modern in style than the old Woolen Mill bridge to West Baraboo, it still has a grace and quality not found in its more modern equivalents.



Notice the twelve bridge lights, six on each side, which gave it a lot of class, but which are now gone. The present Circus Museum footbridge has lights, pleasant to see at night last year when there was still water in the waterworks dam pond.

With regard to the Broadway Bridge, there are rumors that it too is slated for replacement in the near future. It is believed that this bridge is about 70 years old. In Spain there are bridges and aqueducts built by the Romans over 2000 years ago, and still in use. So much for our advanced civilization, as least as far as bridges go.

birds-eye view of the area hanging in the city hall does not show a bridge there at near the end of the nineteenth century, though it does show a covered bridge at the Second Avenue site.

Out of the picture, to the left, would be the railroad bridge abutment which still protrudes out of the water. At that time the railroad passed through West Baraboo on the north side of the river.

## The High Bridge

This scene shows the "High Bridge" connecting downtown Baraboo with the south side of the river and the Northwestern Railroad station. Eventually it connected for a short time with the Warner Memorial Road to Devils Lake, until the Broadway bridge was built.

The High Bridge was removed, it is believed, in the '20s, but the abutment can still be seen at the junction of Oak and Water streets.



This view looks East from perhaps the present location of the Broadway bridge. The present Oak Street (McArthur) dam and its power-producing equipment were nearly below the bridge, but are not seen in this picture as the river is flowing to the right.

## Circus Footbridge

This graceful pedestrian bridge at the Circus World Museum was reflected last year in the still waters of the former waterworks dam pond. This scene is now lost by the ongoing and reportedly difficult removal of the waterworks dam.

Note the lights on the bridge, reminiscent of the lights which once graced the Broadway Bridge.

This museum bridge replaces a temporary bridge contributed at cost or below by Wilbur Deppe in the early days of the Museum. It is reported that some 100 years ago there was a footbridge near this area across the river. It was used by railway workers to cross from the rail yards to their homes on the north side of the river.





## Tales for the Sesquicentennial

# Baraboo always was a good dam town

by Bob Dewel

Why is Baraboo located where it is?

If one is to assume that there will be a city on the Baraboo River, where would you expect it to be?

Perhaps a logical place would be at the mouth of the river, where it joins the mighty Wisconsin river. This would be convenient for fur trading, and for travel by water, as Jean Baribeu the voyageur was reputed to believe. It is thought he gave the river its name. No settlement developed, however.

If not at the mouth of the river, why wouldn't the first settlers select some placid area, with flat ground and fertile fields waiting to be plowed and sown, as eventually happened at Reedsburg? There are some 60 miles of river from which to choose, and not all had the adjacent hills and bluffs to overburden the settlers' horses and oxen as did the Baraboo site.

Perhaps the Caledonia Hills and Butterfield Bridge area would have been a good place, where felled trees could roll down the steep hills almost to the water's edge, to be floated down the river, thus saving tedious hauling.

Well, was it the beauty of Baraboo's idyllic setting among the north and south bluffs which attracted the settlers? Hardly, if you reflect on the character and temperament of our first settler, Abe Wood, and his companion, Wallace Rowen, who were rough and tough pioneer woodsmen with little interest in adjacent Devils Lake or the Shangri-La-like quality of the setting of what became known as the Gem City.

No, it was none of the above that determined the location of Baraboo. It was THE RAPIDS in the river, and the opportunity to make a buck in the harsh frontier by har-

dam at the head of the rapids, between Baraboo and West Baraboo. Their first effort, completed in 1840, was washed away in the great flood of June 1844, though Cole, writing in 1918, says that remnants of the dam were still visible at low water. Gone with the flood was also the mill. Wood's daughter Margaret later told of sitting on the bank of the river with Abe and her Indian mother and sister, watching the destruction of the building by the raging waters.

Wood bought out Rowan and rebuilt the dam in 1845, but it was soon sold to various owners and eventually lay idle until 1859, when the first woolen mill was started. This mill ran continuously until the middle of the 20th century, with the river producing mechanical power, and later electricity for Baraboo's largest industry at the time, the woolen mill.

Somewhere along the line the dam had been redesigned, reputedly by Frank Lloyd Wright, and backed up water all the way to North Freedom, deep enough for motor boats at low speed.

For reasons now obscure, the dam was removed with great difficulty in the '60s, requiring replacement of the adjacent bridge also.

### The Maxwell Dam

About the same time as Wood was harnessing the water power at the head of the rapids, Eben Peck saw his claim at the lower end of the rapids "jumped" by James Van Slyke, as recounted in a previous article. When legal action forced Van Slyke out, James Maxwell purchased the dam in 1847 and started erection of a sawmill. It is not clear whether Eben Peck had left Roseline by then for greater opportunity in Oregon, never to be heard from again.



season he built a grist mill on the north side of the river. This was the largest mill on the river at that time."

Soon to follow were a turning lathe, a shingle machine, chair factory and lath saw. At this time, the first bridge across the Baraboo, at the present Ash-Walnut street location, was built. Also to follow were a tannery and cabinet-making machinery.

The Brown dam was purchased in 1853 by P.S. Bassett and J.P. Sanford, and this enterprise resulted in a large flour mill, wheat being the principal crop of the area at the time. Up to 20,000 barrels were ground per year and shipped "overland with oxen to Kilbourn (now Wisconsin Dells), the nearest shipping point." Bassett built his own barrels and "shipped a great many to Minnesota and

financed by several Baraboo businessmen jointly, which made bedsteads, tables and chairs, and "did an extensive business." It is hoped that someone has preserved some of these items for the historical society.

This was a period of phenomenal growth in Sauk County also. From a population of 102 in 1840, the census grew to 4,372 in 1850, and soared to 18,963 in 1860. The first newspaper, the Sauk County Standard, made its appearance in Baraboo in 1850 also.

### The McArthur Dams

There are two McArthur dams, both extant, and Cole describes them in his 1918 "History of Sauk County":

The water power the farthest down the Baraboo river was the last one constructed, the surveys made and the dam built by



The Basset Mill in Baraboo in 1855. *Historical Society*

nessing the power of the river, so freely given by Nature to this location alone.

The Rapids were what made Baraboo, not only as a little milling settlement at first, but as a developing manufacturing center dependent on the river and its dams. Besides the free non-polluting power, the backed-up water provided interest and beauty to otherwise drab lives on the outposts of civilization.

#### *The Woolen Mill Dam*

Previous articles have referred to the efforts of Wood and Rowan to establish a

With various partners, the Maxwell dam had a \$10,000 sawmill the next year, and the following year found a flour mill and carding mill served by the water power of the Baraboo River. A tannery soon followed but hard times caused temporary cessation of operations for a time.

#### *The Middle Dam*

George Brown had in 1844 platted a village on the south side of the river, and Cole says he "built a dam and sawmill that began operations December 1st. The following year he erected a better saw mill, and the next

other parts of the northwest."

By now, if one has kept count, there are three dams on the Baraboo within about one mile, harnessing the power of the river to produce the goods and services needed by the community. It should be noted that dams at this time did not produce electricity, despite its discovery over a century previously by Benjamin Franklin.

The importance of the dams should not be underestimated. Because of their presence, Baraboo had phenomenal growth for the times, and had a variety of manufacturing plants. In addition to those previously mentioned, there was a furniture factory

George McArthur and Sons about 1869 and 1897. This power has about 6-1/2 foot head, develops 100 horse power, and is used to operate a linen mill, towels being made." This industry still operates in Baraboo, and has enjoyed recent fame with its sports "title towels." The dam now sells power to the major power company, power made by the force of the Baraboo River.

Also extant is the McArthur dam at the foot of Oak street. This dam, in 1918, produced 125 horsepower, and for years operated a linen mill and feed mill. It too produces electric power to be sold to the power company at the present time.

Until a few years ago, the old Maxwell dam, no doubt rebuilt over the years, produced power. At one time the city had its own hydroelectric plant, the latter being erected in 1915 or 1916 according to Cole. It is the old Maxwell dam, or City Waterworks dam, as it is now known, which is being destroyed as we write.

#### *Today*

Dams have sometimes been in the news in Baraboo. They were the first newsworthy event at our founding in 1839. The waterworks dam is probably the most newsworthy event this past year in Baraboo, and certainly the most controversial.

Until recently, however, our dams have been taken for granted, at least until the city fathers, seemingly without protest, accepted an edict of the DNR to remove the waterworks dam. Cole's comment in his 1918 history might be of interest:

"The Baraboo river has faithfully served the public in times past and, although it is still being used to some extent, it is to be hoped that the power that is going to waste will be more fully utilized in the future."

Ostensibly, the river is being restored to "normal," whatever that may be, though there is no talk of reverting other city buildings to prairie and savannah as it once was. There is even talk of a building for the flood department on the river at or near the flood plain where the race was!

Whatever the decision, we should at this time treat the Baraboo River well. It is the reason we are here.

## Tales for the Sesquicentennial

# “Busy Baraboo” and Manchester Village

by Bob Dewel

“The hum of a thousand wheels now greets the ear where, 40 years ago (1839) no sound of progress was heard. The Baraboo River has been made the patient servant of commerce, and the torrent, subdued to man’s service to drive the complicated machinery invented by his ingenuity, has been taught to leap forth in the morning to its toil, and to glide away at evening to its rest.

“The bark canoe . . . no longer ruffles its glassy surface . . . civilization now casts its resplendent rays athwart this ancient stream. Science and industry have measured and used its powers.”

So wrote Butterfield in 1880. It is believed that Butterfield was not even a resident of the county, but rather was a professional historian producing history books around the country. But when it came to Baraboo and its river, he “waxed poetic” and spoke of the newly chartered village as “The Busy Baraboo.”

Butterfield was pretty generous in his praise of the river, for photographs of one early mill area show utter disregard for the river banks. There are no river walks or rip rap or foliage, things which we now try to “restore” the river to some selected previous life. But he was right about the use of the God-given power of the river, for it dominated the industry of the village, making smoke-belching steam engines unnecessary in the days before electricity, and when that came, it produced and produces now — electrical we also

Also not covered will be the circus industry, so well documented over the years, and especially so at the Robert Parkinson Circus World Museum Research Library.

### Early industry

Butterfield’s enumeration of local industries may seem a little feeble to us today, and there probably was some hyperbole involved, for the fact is that agriculture was by far the principal occupation in those days. Moreover, all the industries of those days are gone, superseded by factories that the early settlers would not understand — plastics, tin cans, color printing, electrical coils and transformers, etc. Only the working river remains, faithfully and patiently producing its free electrical power.

### Manchester Village

Many do not know or remember the reason for the name Manchester in Baraboo history. Retaining the name was the Manchester Bridge, moved from Waterworks Park to Ochsner Park a few years ago. The Manchester name came from the early settlement begun in that waterworks area in 1839 or 1840 by Eben Peck, who was referred to in previous articles. A dam was constructed there, which at that time was considered the end of the Baraboo rapids, the McArthur dam on highway 113 coming later.



This is a rare view of the woolen mill dam, with the bridge to West Baraboo in the background.

Contributed photo by Sauk County Historical Society

Butterfield comments, “as a village it will probably never become a success . . . (but) will at least hold its own with the pretentious little village of Lyons (now West Baraboo) which in early days competed for supremacy with Baraboo, and was destroyed.” Butterfield was not too good at predicting!

Besides the name of the bridge, there remains Manchester street, and one wonders if other names of nearby streets date from that era. The railroad now divides it from the south side of Baraboo except

somehow, completed and raised a second dam, the first one having washed out in about 1841, and started a saw mill. A tannery and woolen mill soon followed, but by 1880 the area was still struggling, with a paper mill projected but apparently not finished. It was apparent, however, that Manchester as a village had never survived.

### The Woolen Mill

Aside from the early lumber and grinding activities of the mills

neck of the oxbow, creating the island after which the Island Woolen Mill is named.

Various owners operated the mill in a haphazard manner until 1858 when M.J. Drown began construction of the woolen mill. A series of owners, including George Vittum of what is now the Baraboo National Bank, operated it until 1875, when J. A. McFetridge bought the operation. An experienced Beaver Dam industrialist, he and other owners increased production on a regular basis. Soon 36

### The railroad & the circus

Both Butterfield and Cole cited the advent of the railroad as a major stimulus to the industrial base of the city. Since the railroad story was covered in some detail last year in two installments of "The Benefactors of Baraboo" it will not be stressed in this article.

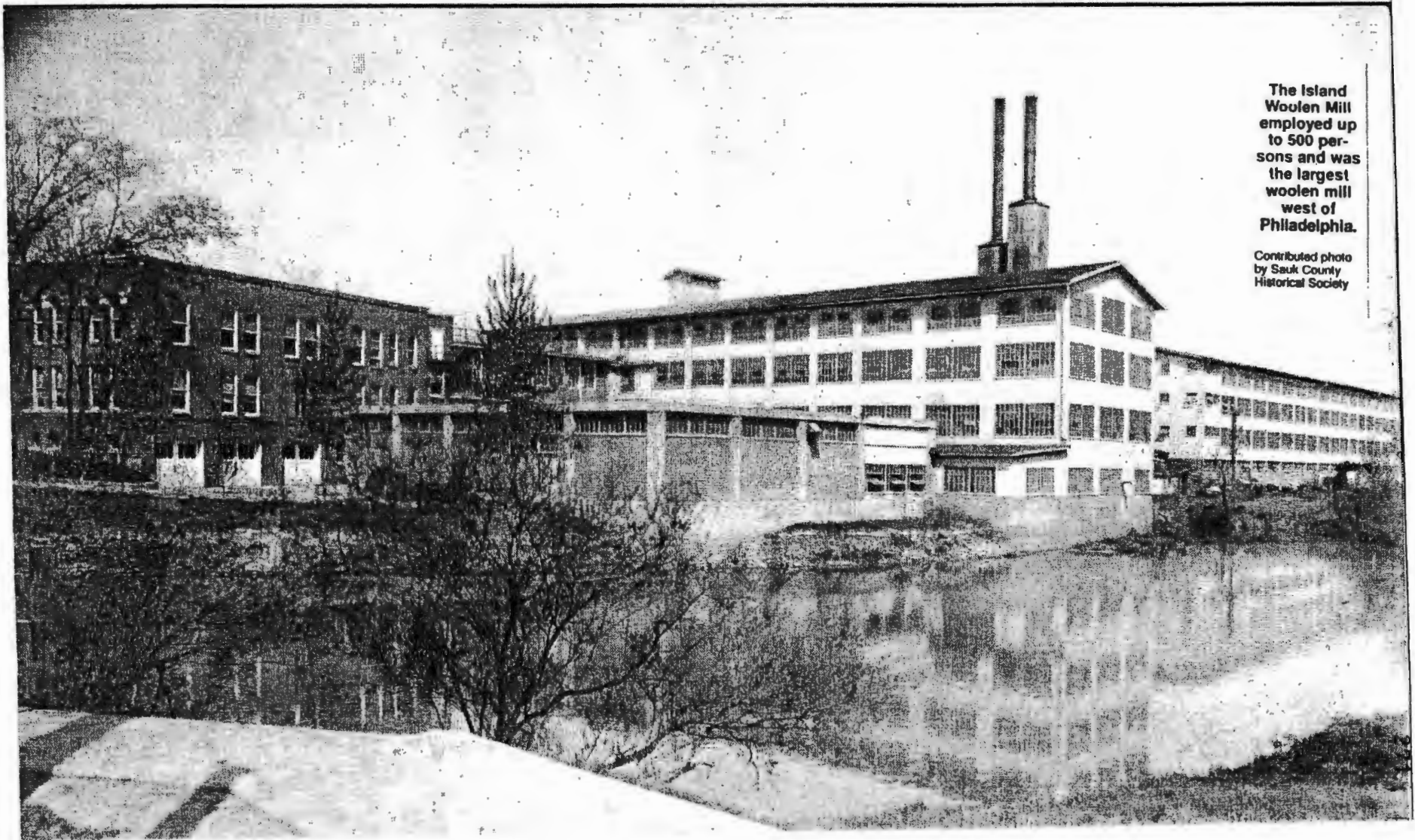
In May 1850, surveyor's records in the Registrar's Office designated the area as the village of Manchester, with lots, blocks, streets and alleys platted out. Like so many dreams of developers, the village never developed beyond the mill by the dam and a few dwellings. Apparently the area still existed on paper in 1880, for

for an inadequate underpass, but in its day the Manchester development made its contribution to the growth of the area.

After the attempted claim-jumping by James Van Slyke, Eben Peck settled in the area but failed to establish a working dam before his departure for Oregon. In 1846 James Maxwell, with the ubiquitous Count Haraszthy involved

as mentioned in previous articles the advent of the Island Woolen Mill in 1858 was to have far-reaching effects on Baraboo. Abe Wood's original dam of the upper rapids had been washed away in 1844, but he and Levi Moore, who lived at Skillet Creek, reconstructed not only the dam: they dug, either by hand or with horses, a 500 foot race across the narrow

employees were producing up to 100,000 yards of wool per year in the 1880s. In time, McFetridge was succeeded by his son, whose widow passed away in recent years. The Island Woolen Mill, one of Baraboo's largest and longest lasting industries, closed in 1949 after some 90 years of opera-



**The Island Woolen Mill employed up to 500 persons and was the largest woolen mill west of Philadelphia.**

Contributed photo by Sauk County Historical Society

# “Busy Baraboo”

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tion. Most of the buildings burned in 1969, and the old office is now used as a youth center.

During its time the dam was the leading industry in Baraboo, employing as many as 500 persons in the largest mill west of Philadelphia. It made blankets for the army in World War I, and later made upholstery for Chrysler and Ford.

The dam produced electricity as recently as the 1950s, when transformers made in Baraboo by Neco Company were installed. Unfortunately, the dam was removed in the mid-1960s.

## The railroad

Possibly the event contributing the most to “Busy-Baraboo” was the advent of the Northwestern Railroad in 1870. Realizing that the village didn’t have a significant future without rail service, a courageous city council in effect mortgaged the city’s future with what became a \$70,000 gift to the railroad to come. In 1998 dollars this is more like a million dollars, and the council wisely put the matter to a referendum which

passed easily. Apparently the citizens were courageous also.

The railroad and its importance to Baraboo was covered in some detail in two articles last year in the “Benefactors of Baraboo” series in the *Sun*. As was noted above, the railroad is only recognized in this article as a major and still active facet of the city’s growth.

## Other industry

The records show a plethora of industries that came and went during the 19th century, with factories making tubs and barrels, sash and blinds and doors, furniture, shingles, chairs, wagon gearing, bricks, plus a foundry and breweries. And of course the McArthur towel industry, founded in 1885 and now over 100 years old, became a major factor in the following century.

But the most unusual industry of all was to be started, and to fail, shortly after the turn of the century. It will be discussed in the next article.

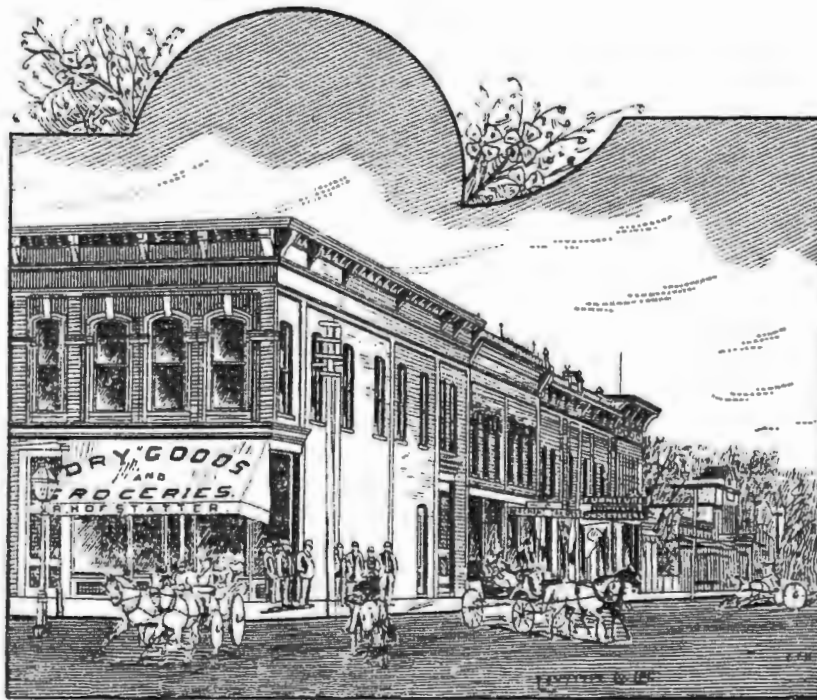


Contributed photo by Sauk County Historical Society  
This graceful bridge crossed the millrace originally dug by Abe Wood and Levi Moore. The bridge was much more recent. Both it and the lagoon are now gone.



Island Woolen Mills, Baraboo, Wis.

*James Adams Collection*



NORTH SIDE THIRD STREET, EAST OF OAK.



Devils Lake has always been popular with children of all ages. This boy and girl were carefully posed on the north shore and appeared on a stereoscope card promoting the area, taken by famous Dells photographer, H. H. Bennett.