



A walk through history

Downtown Tour

Tour Guide notes for the Downtown Brainerd History Walk

Items in brackets are directional instructions for the tour guide; not to be read aloud. However, if you are using this guide as a self-guided tour, YOU are the tour guide, so read on! You might ask if someone in the group would like to read the brochure portions of the tour, or several might take turns reading. If the group is large it would be helpful to have them carry one or two of the photo pages, perhaps in the middle and the end of the line. Pre-read this entire Guide Book and determine the items you want to read, depending on how much time your group has allotted. This guide as read can take up to 2 hours depending on group discussion, and it is advertised to keep the walk closer to one hour. Describe the degree of physical difficulty of the walk, ask if anyone has any disabilities, etc. (see below)

See map on back page.

- There are no stairs or steep grades, but high heels should be avoided due to some sidewalk irregularities, and we will be crossing the RR tracks twice. We'll be walking about 1.4 miles.
- We will be following the crosswalk walk signals correctly at all times so that there are no accidents!
- Let me know if you need to take a rest!
- You will notice our Brainerd History Walk Marker at most of the upcoming locations on our tour.



1 BRAINERD PUBLIC LIBRARY (1986):

The current one, let's start here! The Brainerd Public Library was established in 1904 and was a founding member of the Kitchigami Regional Library system in 1969. Originally housed in a Carnegie library, the current building was constructed in 1986.

As we make our way to the first historic site, here is a bit of the early history of Brainerd.

Talk and walk the next 2 blocks starting EAST on Norwood St.
to South Sixth St., then NORTH to US Bank.

The railroad appears on the scene:



c. 1870's NPRR Repair Shops

In 1870, the U. S. Government focused on extending railway lines to the Pacific Coast and the Northern Pacific Railroad (NPRR) formed as a commercial venture to take advantage of this opportunity. There were three key activities for the NPRR:

- 1) the building and operation of the railway to the Pacific
- 2) the identification of business opportunities linked to the railway
- 3) the settling of the towns through which the railway went

As part of the incentive for the railroads, they were given property from the U. S. Government along the railway lines, and could sell or use it. Exploiting lumber and mineral rights was an important part of the business of the railroads. These activities drove the development of the early years of Brainerd, and extended well into the 20th century. In fact, the railroad continues to be active in the city, although in a different way than in the 19th century.

The initial buildings and settlement were planned and implemented by the Northern Pacific Railroad. As we walk you will see how the city was organized around the railroad, with commercial, governmental, and residential sections. The railroad also supported the logging industry, for at least the last two decades of the 1800s.

Brainerd's settlement started in 1870; by 1880 there was a population of 1,864, and by 1900 this had reached 7,524. Reflecting the ample supply of lumber, most of the first buildings were made of wood. None of these buildings has survived, mostly because there were frequent fires in the early days.

On this tour, you will want to be on the lookout for two things:

- 3 major building projects completed in the last decade in downtown Brainerd, 2 being obvious, but the third not so easy!
- 3 different districts of the city, which we will walk through or see.

Early History:

The city owes its existence and much of its importance to the Northern Pacific Railway. Before it was decided that the railroad would come to the area, there was no Brainerd, and no thought of a settlement here.

In an effort to provide the northernmost crossing of the Mississippi River to areas of the west, the railroad sought a good place to cross. The original crossing point was long going to be the settlement of Crow Wing, but financial dealings with the landowner failed. The railroad then looked farther north, in fact to a shallower and less-steeped location at French Rapids two miles upriver. When this failed in a similar manner, the site of the present Railroad Bridge was chosen. Since there was not yet a city plat or name, the "town" was merely called "The Crossing" in 1870. The early settlers called it OGAMAGUA, translated in Indian language as "a swift movement across a river".

Although Brainerd was already on the way to being a bustling frontier city by the summer of 1870, it was not until Sept. 23, 1871 when the plat of Brainerd was filed for record. A center square was spared from subdivision and marked "reserved". This area became Gregory Square. It was named after the middle name of John Gregory Smith, the first president of the Northern Pacific Railroad. The name chosen on the plat was only then called Brainerd, which was the maiden name of Mr. Smith's wife. (Historian Carl Zapffe Jr. however felt that our City of Brainerd was not named after Mrs. J. Gregory Smith, but rather after her father Lawrence Brainerd, one-time Governor of Vermont and the head of numerous Vermont railroading enterprises.)

– Andrew Hook, 2008



Lyman P. White Sr.

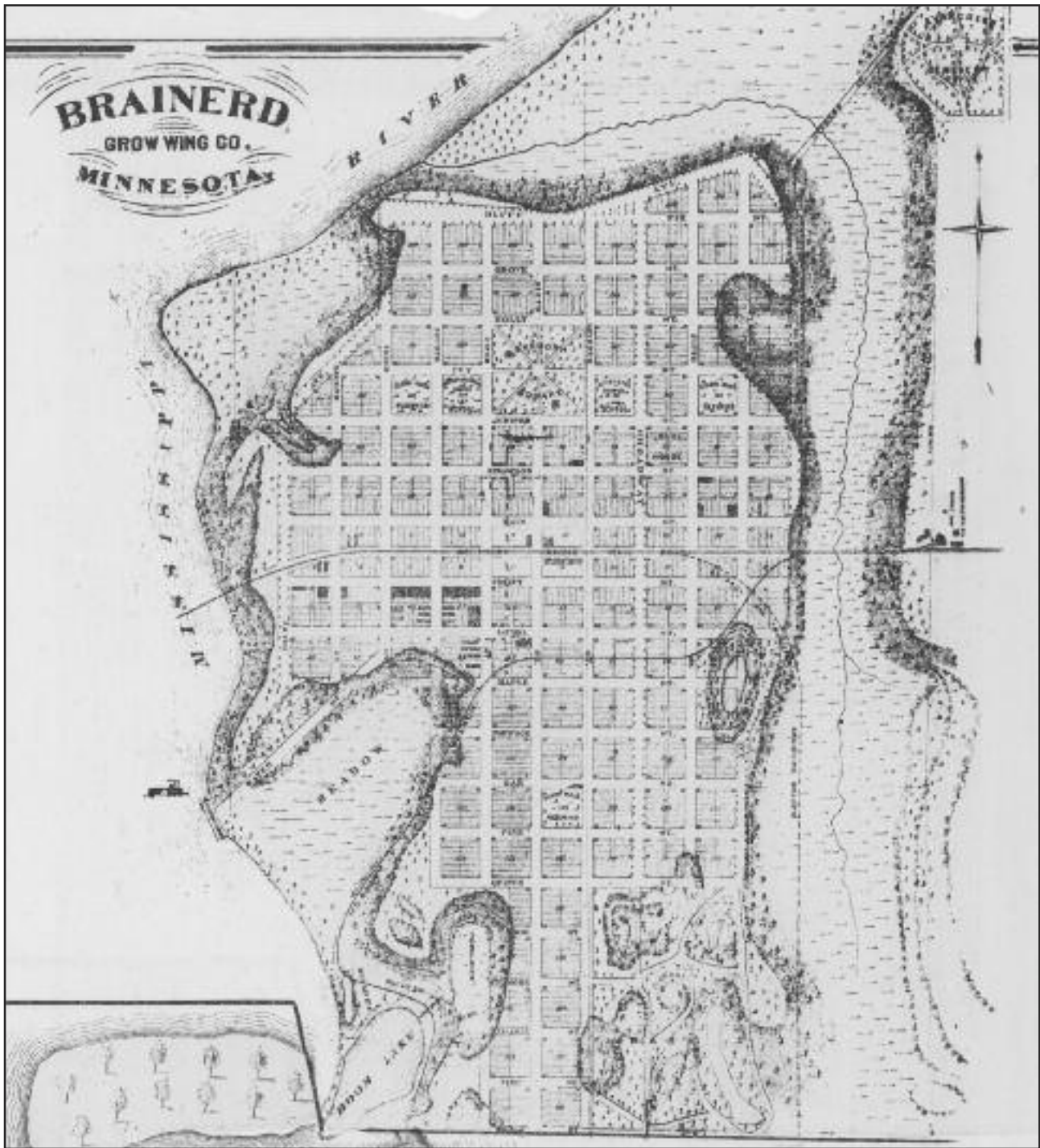
Lyman P. White Sr. was called the "Father of Brainerd". As an agent of the Lake Superior and Puget Sound Land Co., he was responsible for platting railroad towns and selling lots to new residents. That was his job at "The Crossing" when he arrived here by stage in 1870 at age 60. He built Brainerd's fourth building, the first frame house in Brainerd, with lumber coming by team, about 60 miles away from Sauk Rapids. He was president of the first city council, second mayor of Brainerd and helped organize the First National Bank and the first school district. He died in 1902 at age 92 and is buried in Evergreen Cemetery.

- Brainerd Daily Dispatch



*One of the earliest known photos of the young town,
Front St. looking east from South 3rd St., c. 1870*

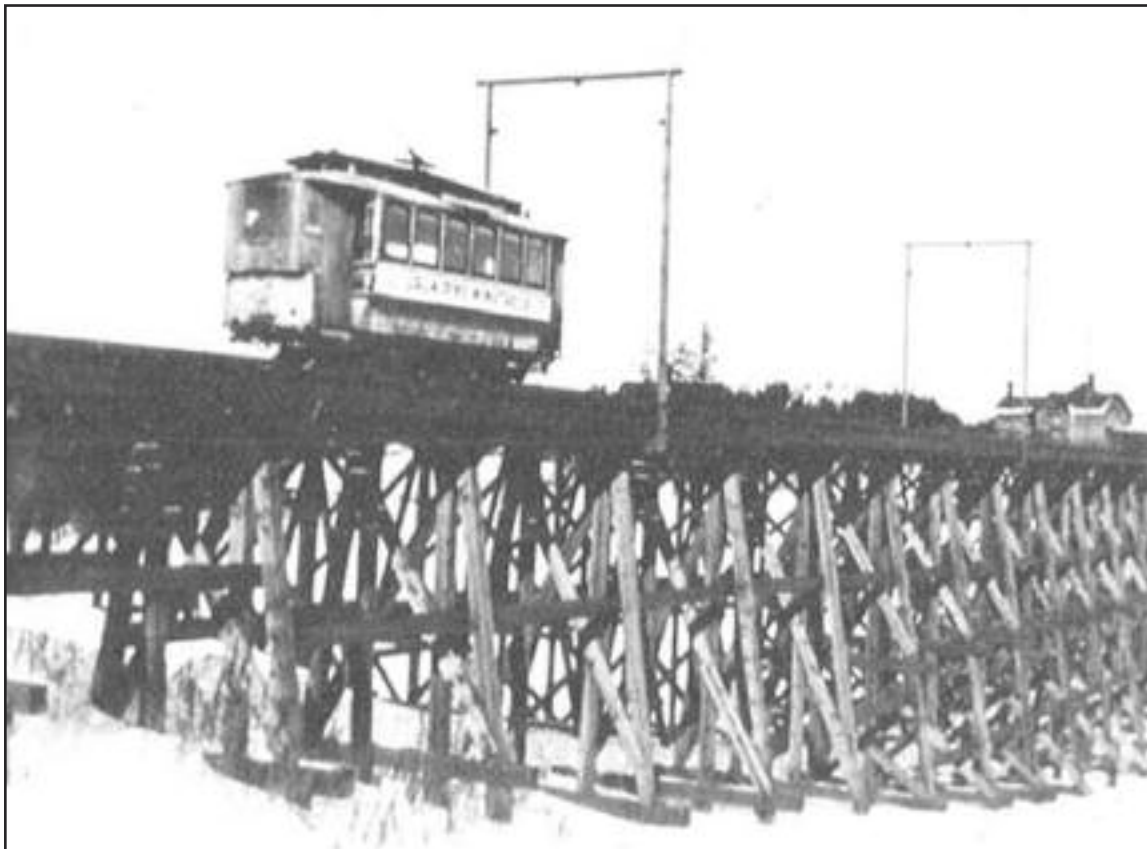
The following are two maps. The first was published in the 1874 Andreas Atlas. In the other, local historian Ann M. Nelson has painstakingly updated it with modern-day gridding and inserted markers indicating locations of major buildings and businesses up to 1950, found on the legend at the right.



1874 Andreas Atlas

In the first, notice how the town is really a peninsula rising from the south end. Growth was quite limited from the start as the small town was surrounded on 3 sides by water! On the west it was the river, on the north it was the river and the swampy low areas, and on the east was a creek and its huge ravine, again low. To expand, it needed bridges; not just a railroad bridge, but at least 2 wagon bridges. These were not to come for several years, in fact to cross the river it was by ferry boat or wanigan for 11 long years, 1883 brought the Laurel St. Bridge. Prior to this, essential foot traffic such as doctors going to and from the Northern Pacific Hospital on the west side of the river used a two-plank walkway on the railroad bridge running between the tracks. On the ravine side to the east, crossing meant driving across planks over the creek until 1885.

Then a wagon bridge and separate electric railroad bridge truly made Brainerd grow since brickyards, the dam, lumbering and logging, the pulp and paper mills and most importantly, the Northern Pacific Shops were all located in NE Brainerd! So well used were the bridges that this area was finally filled with earth in 1914 and was dubbed "The Fill".

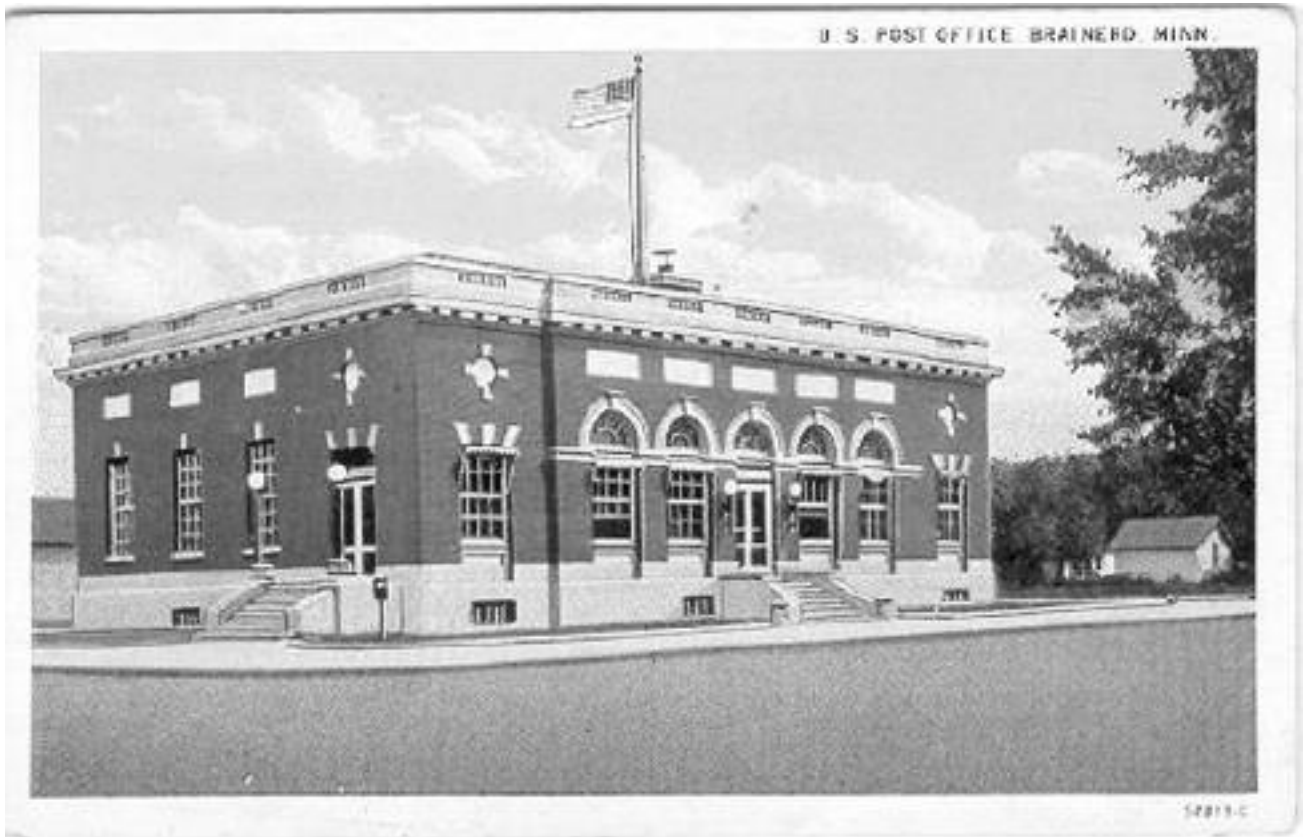


*Brainerd Electric Street Railway car
-Frank Butts Collection*

2 POST OFFICE (1910-1960):

SOUTHEAST Corner of 6th and Maple, building is gone, currently a parking lot

The Brainerd Post Office was built at a cost of \$50,000 on the southeast corner of Sixth and Maple Streets, and housed the post office for fifty years, beginning on April 1, 1910. In September 1960, the postal facilities were moved to the Federal Building on the southwest corner of 5th & Laurel Streets. The old building was demolished to make way for a parking lot.

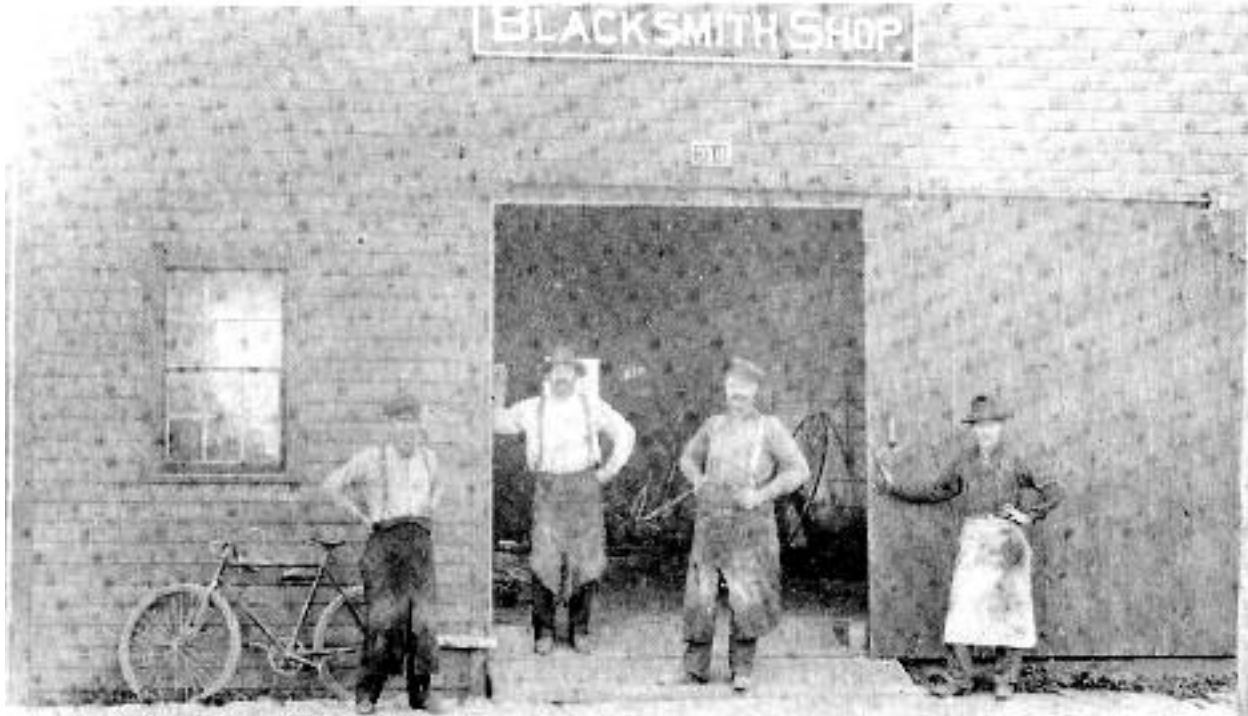


Cross Maple Street to the Northwest corner of 6th and Maple Streets.

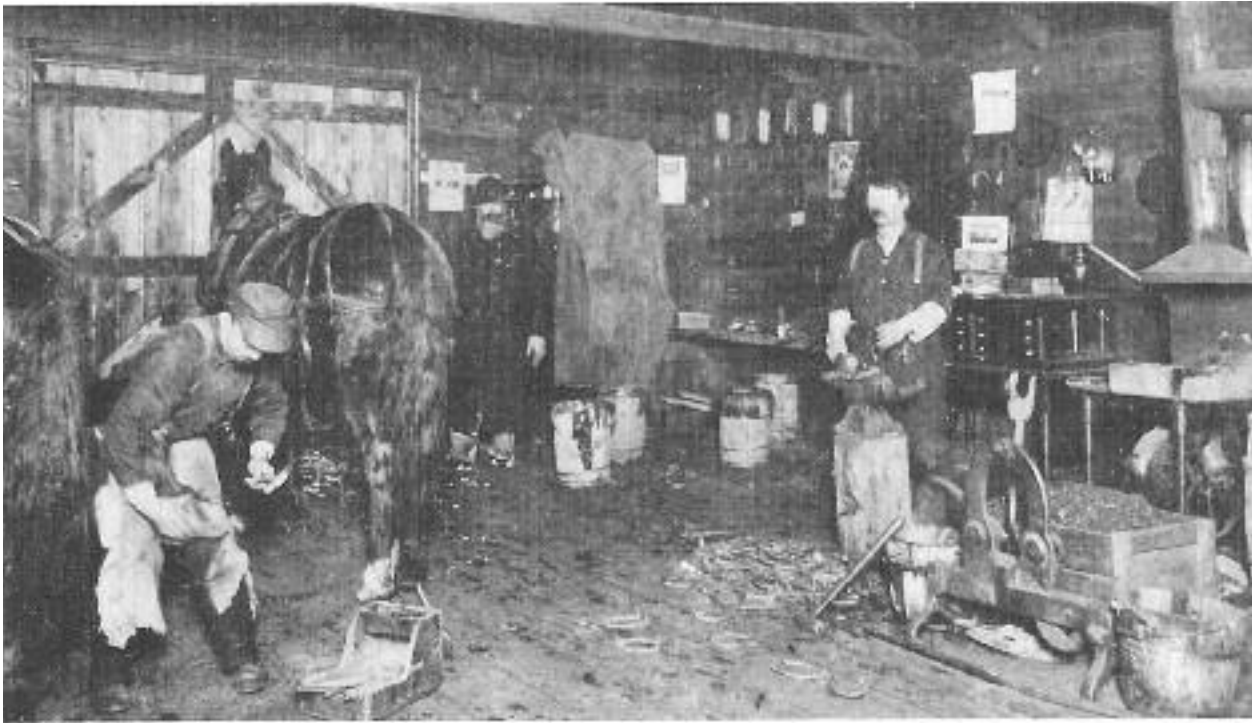
Building gone, only a plaque remains by the current US Bank.

Notice the 1971 Centennial Marker here, but it is missing the original stone pedestal; the plaque is just off the ground to the left of the US Bank entrance. We found out that these plaques were made at the Brainerd Foundry. Eighteen were planned, but it appears as though none were installed by the intended 1971 city centennial date. By October 10, 1975, only two were in place for the nation's bicentennial. We have found only 8 installed, but since then we uncovered 8 more, so 2 are still missing. This is strange, since it is not ancient history!

This site was one of Brainerd's first blacksmith shops, which provided harnessing and shoeing for the horse-drawn wagons for many years. The way to get to Brainerd in those days included rail, river, horse, stage, unless one really liked to walk!



*Outside Fred Drexler's Blacksmith Shop located at 316 South Sixth Street, Brainerd.
Fred Drexler is third from the left. The photo was shot in the early 1900's.*



*Inside view of Fred Drexler's Shop.
Drexler came to Brainerd from Kansas in 1888 at the age of 22 for a job
as a blacksmith at the Northern Pacific shops.*

Photos courtesy of the Brainerd Daily Dispatch's *Out of the Woods*-1994.



When Fred was not busy, he made ice-fishing spears, and was one of the few blacksmiths who stamped his name on the spears. Not only are these spears of superior quality using the wedge-key method of assembly. They are one of the most prized spears worldwide amongst collectors. So, if you find a spear stamped "F. DREXLER", you have made a historic find indeed!

Go N to stop lights on Laurel St., cross street to the NW corner.



On the way to the next stop, envision yourself in an earlier time looking north on South 6th Street. How has it changed? The large building in the upper left is our next subject.

4

IRON EXCHANGE BUILDING (1911-1971):

NW corner of 6th and Laurel, building gone.

Gone but not forgotten, this imposing building was on the NW corner of 6th and Laurel Streets, probably the largest building in downtown Brainerd, then or since. Built of yellow-enamel brick by W. D. McKay, Ransford R. Wise, George Holland, and George LaBar in 1910-11, it was the largest single business structure in the city. It occupied almost the entire southeast quarter of the block on the west side of Sixth Street between Front and Laurel Streets and contained store space, office space, lodge rooms, a restaurant and a hotel. The building burned on July 22, 1970 and was demolished shortly thereafter.



Iron Exchange Building about 1946.

Cross street going E on Laurel St.

5

ELKS HOTEL (1926):

Continue East

The Elks Lodge & Hotel as it was named was built in 1926 for \$175,000. This building, unlike the Iron Exchange, was built at the start as a multi-use facility; a lodge and a hotel, for the express purpose of retiring the debt fast and making money on the hotel. The scheme worked well as the Elks was debt-free in just 18 years, burning the mortgage in 1944! Look for two cornerstones!



Elks Hotel 1926

Continue East

6 PARKER BUILDING (1909), now the "E. L. Menk Building":

NW corner of 7th and Laurel Streets.

This wonderful building made of unique red brick was built on the northwest corner of Seventh and Laurel Streets in 1909 by Charles N. Parker to house the former Northern Pacific Bank. This building contains the first elevator in Brainerd. In 1906 the bank became the Citizens State Bank until 1927, and in 1920 Con O'Brien bought the building. Sometime after 1927 the corner part of the building, which currently houses E. L. Menk Jewelry, became Johnson's Pharmacy/Rexall Drugstore. The largest section of the Parker building, with entrances on Laurel and Seventh Streets, housed Scott's Store, which was a five and dime similar to Woolworth's.

In 1980, it was put on the National Registry of Historic Places. Stand back to the edge of the curb and look up and you will see the stone inscription of the Citizens State Bank still there!



A recently found photo of the construction of this gorgeous building!



1912 postcard of Citizens State Bank



A colorized photo postcard showing BOTH Citizens State Banks!

7

BRAINERD STATE BANK (about 1922), now Downtown Art & Frame:

Look across Laurel Street to the south.

Long before this classic building was built, the bank started out as Security State Bank in 1908, and then later became Brainerd State Bank. The bank failed in 1924. This later became the third location of Citizens State Bank. Notice on the above and below photos, how the façade was modernized. The round pillars are gone in the front, but look closely and you'll see how they are hidden behind brick.



Photo is looking NW, down Laurel Street.

Look across Laurel Street to the EAST, notice the 2 blocks that are dated, named, or both at the top of the buildings. See if you can find the "modernized" block, and its date... is it covered? The one skirted in metal seems out of place here. What are your thoughts on modernization?

Continue EAST to 8th St.

8

O'BRIEN MERCANTILE (1883-1898, 1898), now Thrifty White Drug:

In the early days, all of North and South 8th Street was called Broadway Street. Located on the NE corner at 221 South Eighth Street (Broadway St.), it was originally established in 1883 as a saloon by Cornelius (Con) O'Brien, Sr. The building later housed the O'Brien Department Store, which burned in 1898 and was rebuilt. After Montgomery Wards moved out of the SW corner to the East Brainerd Mall in the 1960s, O'Brien's store moved there (now Bob & Fran's). O'Brien & Sons Wholesale Grocers was on the SE corner. That building eventually became a warehouse and burned in the 1950's and the First Federal Savings & Loan took its place. Mr. O'Brien had this corner tied up over the years, occupying three of the four corners, although not simultaneously.

As a side note, in 2010 this tour included a walk across the street to see the last of the granite curbing in front of this building. Unfortunately, the street was redone and the 1880's curbing was hauled off to the landfill. Not all of our history left us a hundred years ago, it is still vanishing.

9

SLEEPER OPERA HOUSE (1882-1898):

This building was just north of the present Thrifty White Drug store. Seating 1,000, it was the largest auditorium then or since and was made of Brainerd-made red brick. It burned down January 2, 1898.



Sketch from the 1888 Smalley's Norwest Magazine.

Go north just past the *current* Last Turn Saloon, which is the Lakeland Building.

10 LAKELAND BUILDING (1913):

The same 3 men who a year before built the first three year-round homes on lots in St. Columbo on Gull Lake, namely W.A. Barrows, D.L. Fairchild and Carl Zapffe, incorporated here the Brainerd Model Laundry Co. and instituted the first up-to-date laundry and completely equipped cleaning establishment in Brainerd. It was specially erected to accommodate this new and large business. It brought laundry by rail express from as far away as Crookston, MN. In 1924 E. F. Meyer of St. Cloud purchased the business then in 1936 moved it to Washington Ave. Later tenants were the US Employment Service, and the Minnesota Division of Employment and Compensation. Walk past this brick building and look back and up, and you'll see the remnants of the Brainerd Model Laundry sign still painted on the north brick wall, there likely so it could be seen from the trains.

[Cross Front St., then head WEST]

11 FREIGHT DEPOT, NPRR (1904):

Like most Northern Pacific buildings of this era, it is built with Brainerd Schwartz Milwaukee Cream Bricks. This building has stood the test of time, and still serves much the same purpose.

12 CULLEN BLOCK (1880):

[Stand at NORTH end of 7th St.]

This brick building was built by a softdrink manufacturer, James Cullen, at the SE corner of 7th & Front streets. Most of the main buildings back then were named and dated at the top. Notice how most buildings are still original near the top of the building, refaced only lower where one can easily see.

On the way to Sixth St., look at the block to the south and then the photo below of 1920's Front St. Notice which buildings are no longer with us, and how the facades have changed over the years.



Front Street 1920s

Continue WEST to NE corner 6th & Front Sts., and read about the next 4 historical locations on this corner.

13 FIRST NATIONAL BANK (1882), also known as the “W. W. HARTLEY BUILDING”:

The Bank of Brainerd, first incorporated in 1879, became the First National Bank on October 11, 1881. It moved from its original location on the SE corner of Fifth and Front to here after its completion in 1882. The bank also has its name at the top of the building, in gold no less! Located on the southeast corner of 6th & Front Streets, it is better known as the First National Bank building today. In 1916 the building was purchased by the officers of the bank and is remodeled, the first of two such new facades. Note the present facade’s lack of any upper windows!

There is a 1971 Centennial Marker here on the west side.



1888 stereograph, of the original façade.

Point out 2 other blocks that are named or dated on the way.



1928 post card, second of 3 façades.

Read story below if there's time or just condense to mention the bank robbery.

Zane Smith's obituary and story:

Zane Smith passed away June 6, 2003 at Bethany Good Samaritan Village in Brainerd. He was 89.

Smith was a young man -- just a few years out of high school -- when he arrived to work at 8:15 a.m. Oct. 23, 1933, at the First National Bank building at the corner of Sixth and Front streets in Brainerd, where he worked as a clerk and messenger boy.

He told *The Dispatch* in 1999 that he had recently started working at the bank, a building that still has bullet nicks in the brick from that October day when Baby Face Nelson and his gang held up the bank, holding hostage several bank employees, including Smith.

Smith said that morning he carried the day's mail to bank president George D. LaBar's desk and didn't notice anything out of the ordinary, even though five bank robbers, armed with at least two machine guns and .45-caliber automatics had been inside the lobby and working as look-outs in the street for about two hours. They had gained entry at gunpoint just before 6 a.m. when a worker came to check on the basement furnace, he said.

"Baby Face Nelson crouched down on his knees in front of a huge pillager," said Smith in 1999. "He jumped to his feet and took after me. He took a hold of the top collar of my top coat and twirled me around and socked me in the jaw."

The blow knocked Smith off his feet and he was dragged across the floor to a spot where the bank janitors, Mr. and Mrs. L.A. Peterson, and guard Bob Titus, were located.

One by one the bank employees were corralled and stretched out on the front office floor until they numbered a baker's dozen. When the tellers arrived, each was taken in turn to open their separate vaults.

In the end, the bank robbers stole \$32,000 from the bank. The loss was covered by insurance.

With the money collected and the time approaching 9 a.m., Baby Face Nelson and his gang left the employees in a rear bathroom. The robbers sprayed the lobby with machine gun fire as they exited and as a Chicago salesman attempted to enter the building.

Smith said between the yelling and the spray of bullets, the employees thought the salesman had been shot. Additional gunfire spattered nearby buildings.

"They simply sprayed up and down the street as they left to make sure that no one was going to bother them," said Smith.

The gunmen had been staying at a resort on the north side of Round Lake and were familiar with the first names of bank employees, work schedules and escape routes.

"It was quite the experience," Smith said, "but one I wouldn't like to go through again -- after it was all over and you realize what could have happened."

-June 9, 2003 Brainerd Daily Dispatch

14 RANSFORD HOTEL (1904-1975):

[No building, now a parking lot.]

This red brick building on the SW corner of 6th and Front Streets was built by Ransford Rogers Wise, on the former popular Bly's Block of 1871 which later burned. After this big loss, Brainerd was in need of hotels and meeting halls, and this filled the need for many years. It was condemned and demolished Aug. 9, 1975.



Christ Street - Looking South. - About 1906 G-1056



An early view of Sixth Street looking south.

YMCA, NORTHERN PACIFIC (1888-1946):

Yet another Northern Pacific Railroad building, it opened in 1889 on the NW corner 6th & Front Streets. It closed in June of 1923 and reopened in May 1924 after “extensive repairs, improvements and alterations”. The original building is gone, and was replaced by the Golden Grill Cafe, which was later remodeled in to a pharmacy. In 1901, on the 6th Street side of the building, Brainerd’s first sidewalk was laid, while the streets were still dirt.



16 HOBO PARK:

You are now standing on the NE corner of 6th & Front Streets.

This “park” as it was called, was located on the east side of Sixth Street just south of the Northern Pacific Railroad tracks. Also called Depot Park, it was a popular meeting place. It once had a 2-block long, 2-way toboggan slide here, where one would slide to one end then climb the other one for the return trip! This was later location of the Baehr Building-1936, and the Brainerd Theater, 1938, demolished Feb. 1999. One of the earliest bandstands stood here for a quarter century until a new one was built in Gregory Park in 1920.

A New Toboggan Slide

BRAINERD, Dec. 18.--Brainerd’s new toboggan slide, which is being erected immediately in front of the Sleeper block, will be one of the finest in the Northwest. It is 1,360 feet in length and consists of two tracks, down one side and back on the other. An ice rink is to be constructed in the center. The elevation at each end of the slide is 35 feet. (*Minneapolis Tribune*, 19 December 1886, p. 18)



Baehr Building-1948 photo

Head NORTH on 6th St.

Here at the railroad tracks (but not ON the tracks!) looking NE we can see the Carnegie Library, which will be on a future North History Walk. We are now looking at a new district. Which one?

Look up now at the Water Tower, it's a great view of it!

17 DEPOT, NPRR, FIRST (1872-1917):

In front of the Chamber Of Commerce building, point out the 1971 stone monuments.



1872

Built by the Northern Pacific Railroad in March 1872 this stately building stood on the southeast corner of Main St. (now Washington St.) & Sixth Streets, near where the concrete water tower now stands. This depot burned down in 1917.



1896 William Jennings Bryan train visit.

18 WATER TOWER (1920):

(The 1971 stone monument here is also a Minnesota Historical Site.)

This tower is probably the most photographed structure in the city! It has become Brainerd's most popular icon, and is probably also the most photographed FROM structure. Fortunately, someone had the foresight to take pictures from all angles as soon as one could stand on the top of the bowl. In recent years, these 1919 photos have become some of the best research tools for historians, and the quality and detail of them is exceptional!



Note the bandstand in Hobo Park at the bottom of this image.



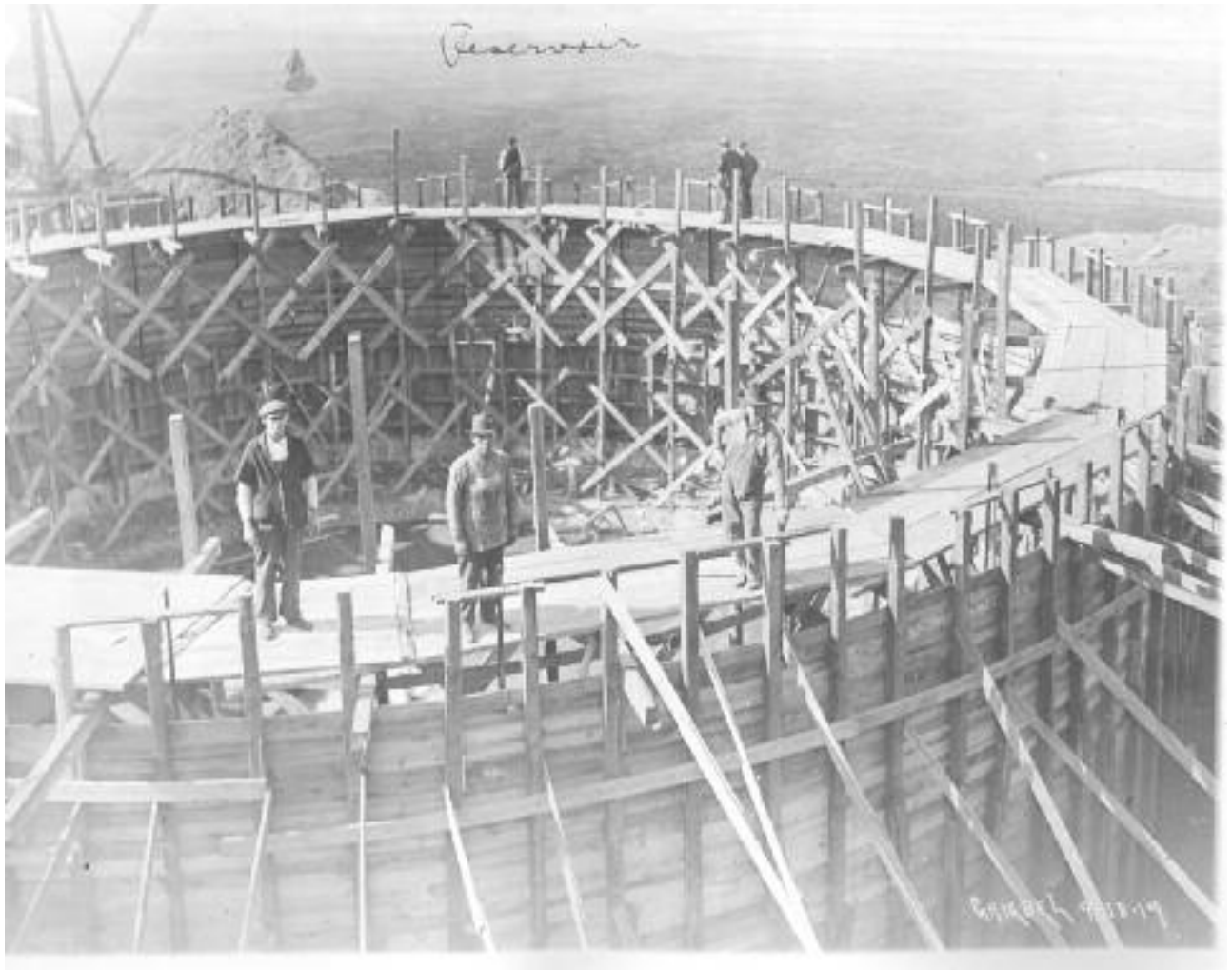
Testing New Fire Fighting Equipment c. 1927

“The contract for this elevated storage tank is let in 1918; it is located on the southeast corner of Washington (Main) & Sixth Streets. L. P. Wolff of St. Paul is the Consulting Engineer and the City Engineer, R. T. Campbell, does the local engineering. The City Water and Light Board handle all the construction work with its own work force headed by its Superintendent Henry Roberts. This storage tank is 134 feet tall with a capacity of 300,000 gallons and is the first all-concrete elevated water tank used for a municipal water supply ever built in the United States. The bowl that holds the water was made in a single continuous pouring.



“A spiral stairway winds around the inside walls of the water tower. The stairs end at about the 90-foot mark on the inside of the tower. A window allows access to the outside set of stairs that lead to the ledge that encircles the tower. The all-concrete landmark has been dry since 1960. The tower is 129 feet tall from its crown-like top to the ground level. The observation ledge is 90 feet above the ground. Inside the tower, a 20-foot ladder leads to a hatch, which is at the bottom of the tower's bowl. The sky can be seen as the hatch is opened to access the inside of the bowl lined with red brick, which once held 300,000 gallons of water. Inside the bowl is a 40-foot freestanding ladder, which rises to the top of the bowl.” (Brainerd Daily Dispatch, 25 May 2003)
The cover has long since caved in, so it is now one big rain-catcher!

“Water is being pumped into the new water tower today. The 300,000-gallon concrete water tower of the new waterworks system near the Depot is being filled. A full tank means an added weight of over 2,000,000 pounds.” (Brainerd Daily Dispatch, October 1920)



[Cross 6th St., to the SOUTH side of Washington St., and stand on the SW corner.]

The Sawmill Inn across the street will also be on a future North History Walk. Does anyone know why it is called the Sawmill Inn?

Answer: The building was once an unused office building from the Brainerd Lumber Company which was moved in 1908 to create a restaurant.

This was a busy corner in the early days. On the NW corner was the marvelous Villard Hotel built in 1882, which burned in 1887. In an article in 1885 it was described as “the most conspicuous building in Brainerd and handsomest in northern Minnesota.” The rebuilding of the Villard Hotel was planned, a foundation dug across the street to the east, but it never materialized. 21 years later came the restaurant mentioned above!

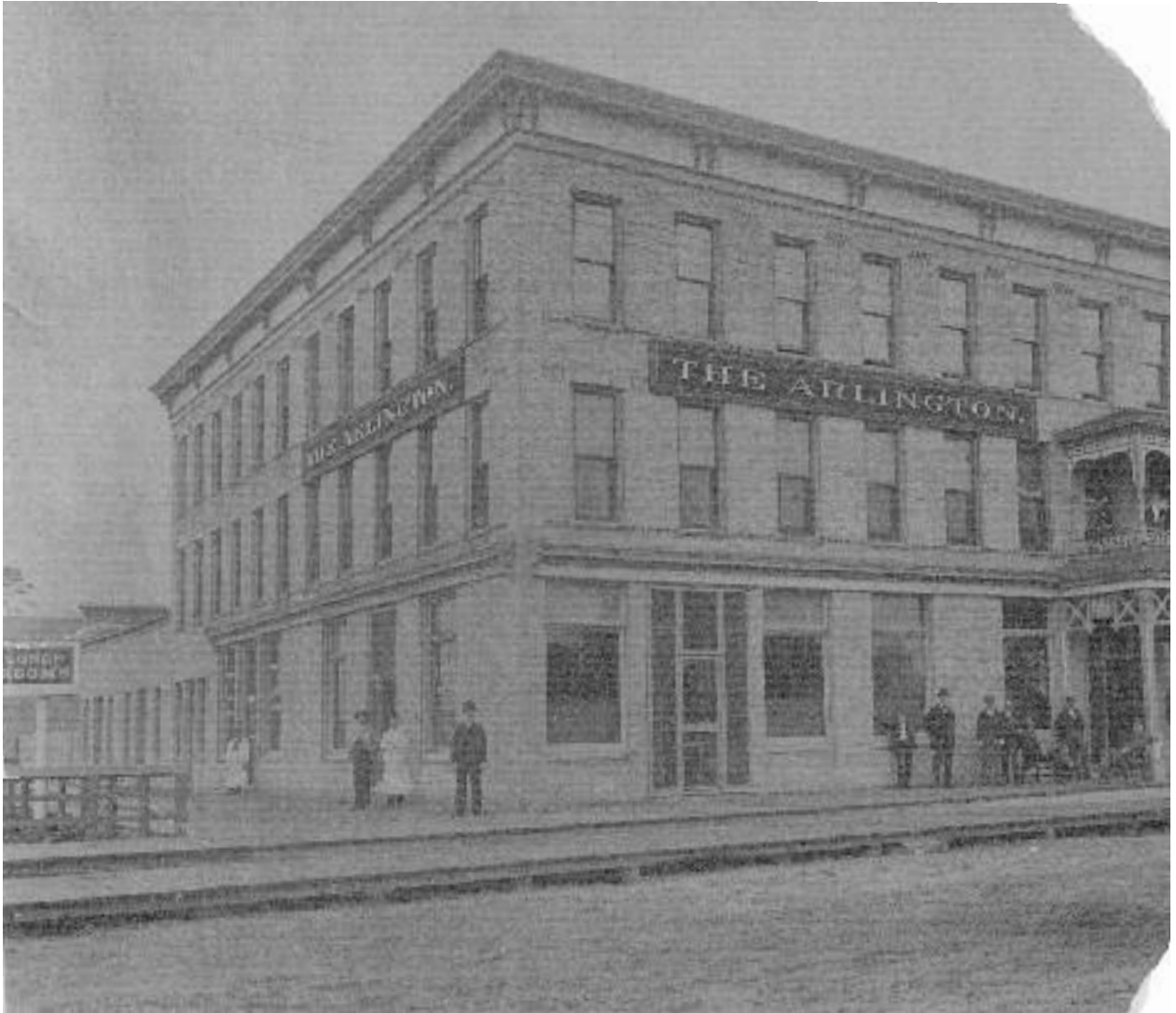


The famous Villard Hotel burns in 1882

The next 2 were both on the SW corner across the street to the west, long gone.

19 ARLINGTON HOTEL (1889-1904):

Built about 1889, this building burned January 1, 1904. Replacing the burned Headquarters Hotel on nearly the same location, this hotel was moved here *piece by piece* from North Dakota by Ransford R. Wise, and reassembled with not one light or window being broken. Below is a rare image of this sizeable building.



Arlington Hotel (1889-1904)

Built by the NPRR and completed in Mar 1871, it was Brainerd's first hotel and used as the depot for a time. It too later burned. This 3 story building had an overhead reservoir for a water supply and a 7 ton ice house. It was replaced by the Arlington Hotel in 1889. There are just remnants of a 1971 monument here, as it was hit by a snow plow in the late 1990's. The plaque was since found in 2008 in the basement of the City Hall, and it is hoped that we can get it re-installed.

As you can tell you are standing on a very important corner in the early years of Brainerd, but fires had their way before we had a water tower for proper water pressure. In the mean time business moved to Front St., then later to Laurel St., and east from there.



Headquarters Hotel

Headquarters Hotel and Depot in about 1872 or 1874.

Can you find the Town Well?

21 DEPOT, NPRR, second (1922-1968):



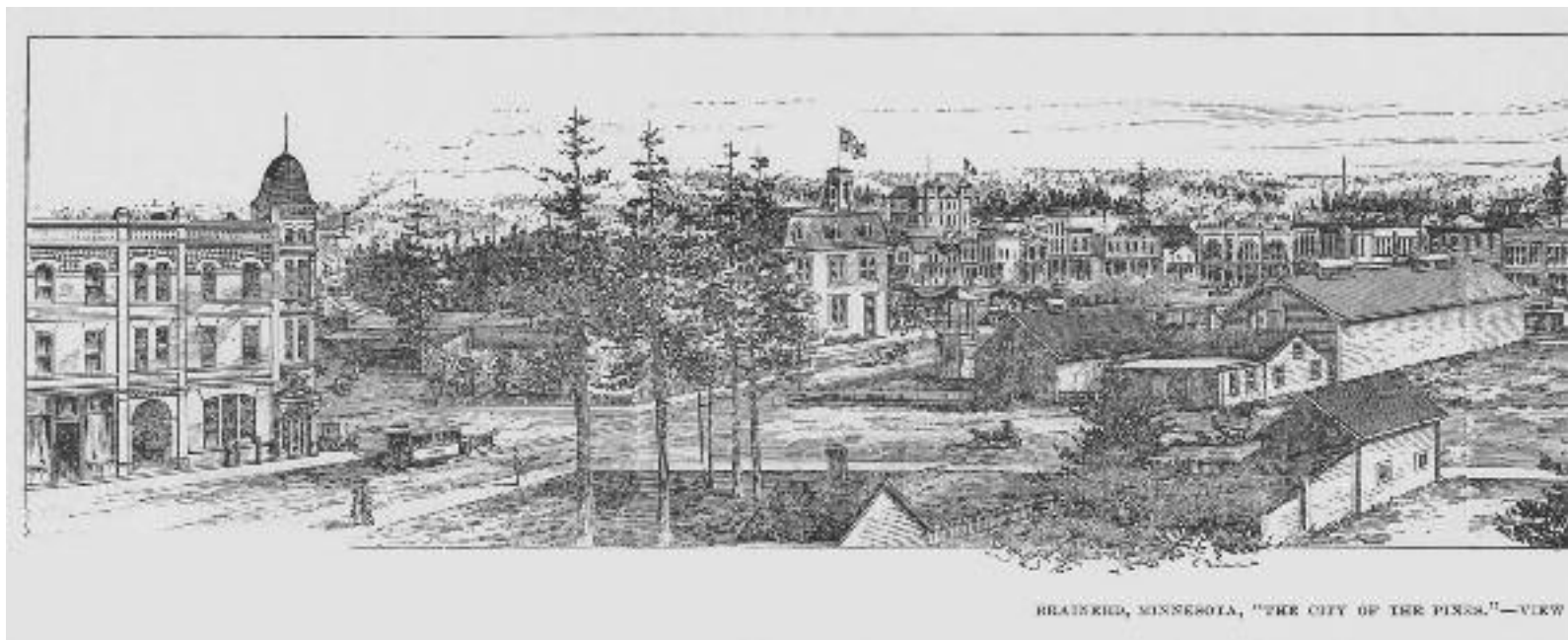
Northern Pacific Depot 1922-1968

This is a sore subject with many locals! A lot of folks think it should have been preserved. In the next 2 block walk westward, look for the 1971 Centennial Marker across the street. It depicts the location of the old City Lock Up.

An Artist's View!

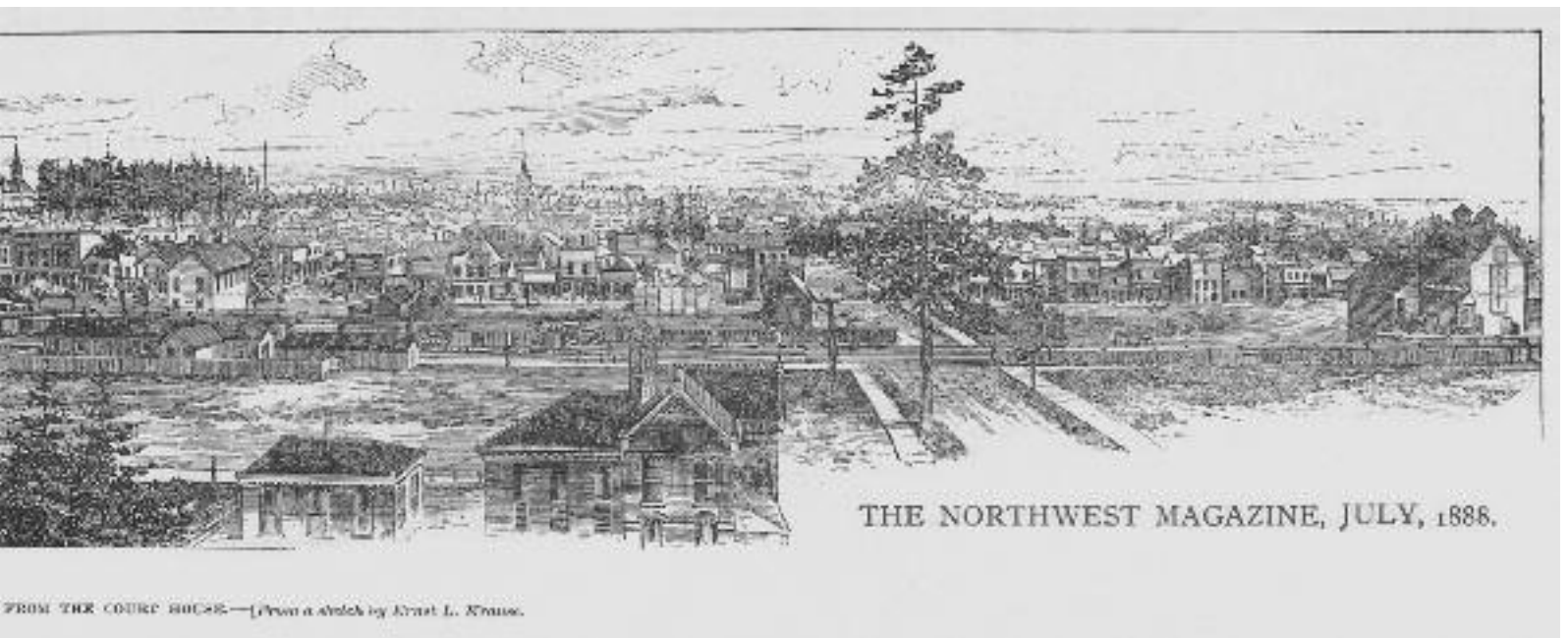
You are now standing a block south of where in 1888, an artist sketched the booming new city, from the top of the FIRST Crow Wing County Courthouse, built in 1883, now an apartment building. You can just see it from here. The artist's sketch was engraved and printed in *The Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine*. The July, 1888 issue featured Brainerd, Minnesota with 16 oversized pages of articles and 31 more sketches of individual buildings. The image was a double-page printing in the magazine's center, somewhat ahead of its time. These "bird's eye view" panoramic scenes were typical of the day, especially along the rail lines, as a way to promote the features of a thriving community. The view shows the Kindred Hotel on the far left *that was never built*, and the horse-drawn streetcar that came west on Kingwood St. and south to Main St., where it turned around and headed back to NE Brainerd.

The following sketch by Ernst L. Krause is from the July 1888 issue of *The Northwest Illustrated Monthly Magazine* by E.V. Smalley.



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Now here is a location that is too far away to visit on our tour, 4 blocks west to the river, but it deserves mention as this is where it all started! There, you can visit this site where there is a 1971 Centennial Marker by the picnic table at the present Dairy Queen. As we walk to our next stop let's learn of Brainerd's earliest beginnings there.



Trading Post (1870-1920's)

The first buildings were built around September and October 1870.

“I found my father in charge of the construction of a building for Fuller & Huestis. That building still stands; it is the old Indian trading post and has been used for fifty-two years as saloon, hotel, trading post and dwelling. Hundreds of carloads of blueberries and tons and tons of deer saddles pass through its doors during the many years when James Hallett has it as a trading post. This is the first frame commercial building in the growing city.” -I. U. White, 1921

The second building in Brainerd, built of hewn logs by Stuart Seeley, is completed on October 10, 1870, and used as a boarding house, saloon and dance hall, until it burns three years later. It is located on the east bank of the river, north of the railroad bridge.

Go WEST on Washington St. to 4th St., then SOUTH.
If time does not allow, you will have to view the next 2 historic
locations looking a block away, or at the end of the tour.

23 COUNTY JAIL AND SHERIFF'S RESIDENCE, (1917).

This brick building was built just before the neighboring Court House to the east. It was both the County Jail in back, and the Sheriff's Residence in front. It now houses the Crow Wing County Historical Society, and has a research library in the lower level. The museum was previously in the lower level of the courthouse next door. For additional historical information, visit our wonderful museum!



County Jail and Sheriff's Residence built 1917

Six sheriffs and their families lived in the house between its construction and 1962, the last was Albert J. Krueger, who died in office in 1962. That year the new Sheriff Warnberg decided not to move into the house, and the residence became the sheriff's offices. A woman was hired to cook for the prisoners and the kitchen continued to be used to prepare the food. The Sheriff's Department moved to the Law Enforcement Center, next door, in 1979.

The building was then restored and remodeled by the Crow Wing Historical Society and opened as a museum in 1983.

The residence has been meticulously restored to look like a typical middle class home of the first decades of the 1900's in Crow Wing County. None of the furnishings is original to any of the sheriff's families; area residents have donated almost everything. Along with the Crow Wing County Courthouse, build in 1920, the building is on the National Register of Historic Places.

Originally, the jail had thirteen cells. Eight cells were located in the area where the logging exhibit is now. Four women's cells were located on the second floor where two cells and a shower are still on display. The tiled room near the entrance to the sheriff's house once had a padded cell. The ramps now have displays on the lumber, railroad and mining industries, which brought most settlers into the county.

24 COURTHOUSE, Brainerd's second (1920):

In 1919 the Board of County Commissioners purchased two blocks of land on the south side of Laurel Street between Fifth and Third Streets upon which was built a new court house, completed in 1920. The interior is polished white and pink marble with a central two-story, balconied court on the upper floors and a domed, stained glass skylight. It is still serving its original purpose, and was put on the National Register of Historic Places in 1980.



Courthouse built in 1920

25 LAST TURN SALOON (built about 1872):

The ORIGINAL, not the existing one, at the SW corner of 4th & Front Streets. This was diagonal from the Nash Finch Building.

The Blueberry War

From a newspaper story, **JULY 23, 1872:**

“A mob attacks the Brainerd jail, where two half-Ojibwe brothers, Te-be-ke-ke-sheck-wabe and Go-go-once, are being held for allegedly murdering a woman. The men are taken to a nearby pine tree and hanged in front of a crowd of 1,000. After the lynching, a rumor spreads among Brainerd's residents that angry Indians are planning to attack the town. Sheriff John Gurrell telegraphs Governor Horace Austin for help. Three companies of troops are sent out, arriving on July 25. The troops find the Indians in the woods picking blueberries, and the entire incident becomes known as the "Blueberry War." -*The Minnesota Book of Days*. The men were never proven guilty.



26 NASH FINCH COMPANY (1901):

This huge building was built in 1901 as Brainerd Flour & Feed Co., later in 1905, Brainerd Wholesale Grocery Co.; 1927, Nash Finch Co.; 1985, Country Foods & Produce Inc.; 1986, vacant; 1996-present, a printing shop. The building was set along the railroad tracks with a spur to accept groceries on a covered dock. The area from here west to the river was the commercial rail dockage location for non-railway company freight, including a host of brewers, petroleum products and gaseous bottled fuel. (From a Brainerd Dispatch article Oct. 4, 1996, for Brainerd's 125th anniversary.)

Go EAST on Front St.

27 FIRE HALL (1872-1914):

At the direct center of North 5th St. on the north side of Front St., was the location of Brainerd's first fire hall. The Brainerd Fire Dept. was first organized Feb. 13, 1872 in Milt Askew's Billiard Hall on Front St., with 37 members paying \$1 each. The picture shown below is not of this first fire hall, rather a picture of the similar 4th Ward Hose House circa 1898 located on 13th Street between Norwood and Oak Streets.



Fourth Ward Hose House c. 1898

28 RUSSELL CREAMERY (1925-1969 or 1970):

This major enterprise made and sold Meadow Gold products, at 425 Front St. The present building was about in the same place as where the fire hall was. A 1971 Centennial Marker is displayed on the building, indicating this as the location of the first fire hall.

29 PARK OPERA HOUSE (1890-1995):

This later became the Paramount Theater, and was demolished in 1995 after sitting vacant for several years, following much talk of the possibility of it becoming our only large capacity auditorium in town.



Park Opera House c. 1905

30

BANK OF BRAINERD (1879-1881):

This was on the SE corner 5th & Front Streets. Coincidentally, there is now another bank on this location!



Bank of Brainerd c. 1881

Go SOUTH on 5th St.

31 FIRE HALL, second (1914):

This now houses driver's license testing, Community Action and others. It was not connected to the City Hall originally as it is today.



Fire Hall built in 1914



Later connecting link foreground, and City Jail in the background.

Stand on this corner for this and the next 3 sites.

32 CITY HALL (1914):

Beautifully restored in the 1990's, this building came dangerously close to the wrecking ball!



33 ARMORY (1936-1996):

Look across street to the west.

This was the location of our first armory, built in 1936, and demolished in 1996. Photos show the new building under construction.



34 GREYHOUND BUS DEPOT (1945):

This unique 1940's Moderné styling building was typical for bus stations, and replaced the two story Gardner Block. The major downtown block's first floor was store space, the second floor was a dance floor and roller rink in the first decade after being built in early 1891.



Below, one of the few photos of the Gardner Block that the new Greyhound Building replaced, tall building on the right.



1938 Winter Carnival, Brainerd to New York sled dog race.

35 LIVELY GARAGE/AUTO COMPANY (1922):

W.E. (Willis) Lively, sold bicycles, second hand goods, and then cars as a Ford dealer in 1916. The completion of the "new" building was finished in February of 1922. Bought in 1922 by Stewart Mills Sr., Henry C Mills, and Mal Clark. In 1942 the Mill Brothers Defense Co. was formed. The second floor was converted into a machine shop, making adapters for bombs during WWII. This later became Mill's Fleet Farm corporate headquarters.

Go to the Answers section (page 50) before leaving this corner.



Looking east on Laurel Street c. 1930

ANSWERS to lookout questions:

1) The 3 major building projects were:

- the new brick office building at 416 South 6th at the SW corner of 4th and Maple, nicely done to look like a period building
- the new county government buildings farther to the west on Laurel St.
- the addition to the Lively Building, to its east, matched so closely it's hard to tell it was added

2) The first district walked was the Business District, and then after the RR tracks started the Residential District to the north, then crossing the tracks coming back south was the Government District.

Head back to the library on 5th St., or swing by the Courthouse and County Jail/Sheriff's Residence, just one block W to see these close up. Then go between the two and cut back to the library through the parking lot.

-Are there any questions?

-Was the tour enjoyable, and should we develop more?

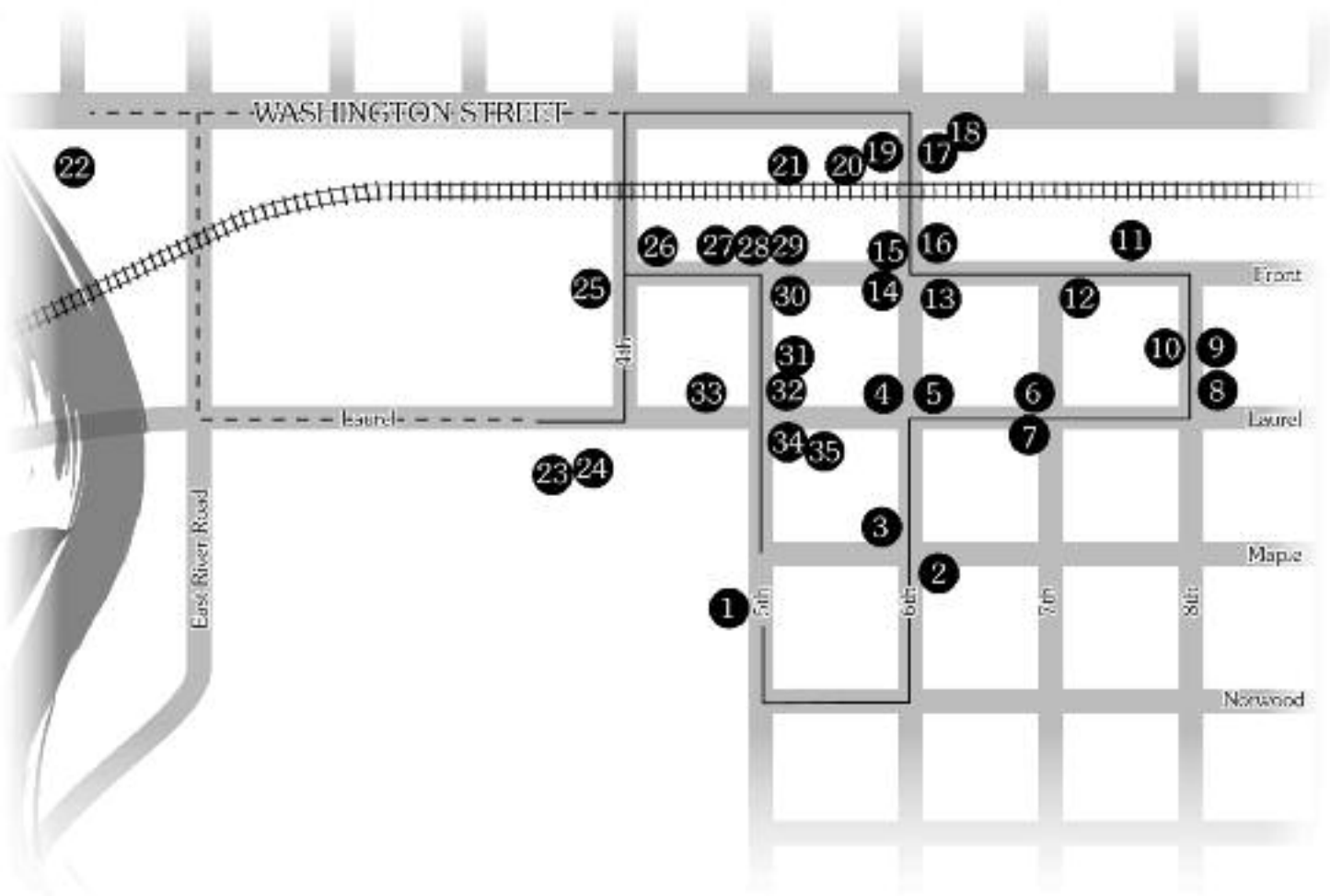
-THANKS FOR COMING, and mention the Walk to a friend!

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- Some photos and research courtesy of Crow Wing County Historical Society.
- Revised 5/30/2008, 12/24/2010, 4/8/2011, 4/27/2011, 5/3/2011, 6/11/2011

A walk through history



Destinations

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---|
| 1) Brainerd Public Library | 19) Arlington Hotel |
| 2) Post Office | 20) Headquarters Hotel |
| 3) Fred Drexler's Blacksmith Shop | 21) Depot, NPRR, Second |
| 4) Iron Exchange Building | 22) Trading Post |
| 5) Elks Hotel | 23) County Jail and Sheriff's Residence |
| 6) Parker Building | 24) Courthouse |
| 7) Brainerd State Bank | 25) Last Turn Saloon |
| 8) O'Brien Mercantile | 26) Nash Finch Company |
| 9) Sleeper Opera House | 27) Fire Hall - First |
| 10) Lakeland Building | 28) Russell Creamery |
| 11) Freight Depot, NPRR | 29) Park Opera House |
| 12) Cullen Block | 30) Bank of Brainerd |
| 13) First National Bank | 31) Fire Hall - Second |
| 14) Ransford Hotel | 32) City Hall |
| 15) YMCA, Northern Pacific | 33) Armory |
| 16) Hobo Park | 34) Greyhound Bus Deopt |
| 17) Depot, NPRR, First | 35) Lively Garage/Auto Company |
| 18) Water Tower | |

Find more online

City of Brainerd Website
www.ci.brainerd.mn.us/history/historywalk

Download:

- An audio version of the tour
- Documentaries of "How Brainerd Began" and "Brainerd's Historic Watertower"
- The full text of this walking tour

