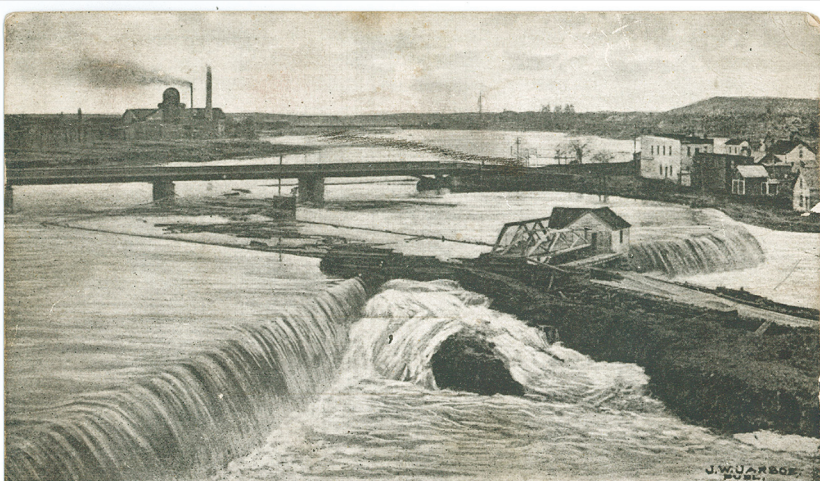




1893

East Versus West

Little Falls, Minnesota



Greetings from Little Falls, Minn.

c. 1912

by Mary Warner

East Versus West, Little Falls, Minnesota
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Layout & design by Mary Warner

Cover photos:

Top: Copy photo by W.E. Christnagel of dam in Little Falls, MN, 1893. This view, looking north on the river, shows both the west and east sides of town. Note the iron truss bridge spanning the Mississippi River and the Pine Tree Saw Mill in the upper left of the photo. MCHS Collections, Early Little Falls & Little Falls Dam box.

Bottom: Postcard with 1912 postmark showing a similar view of the dam and river in Little Falls. Note the wagon bridge that replaced the iron truss bridge in 1902/03. Photo published by J.W. Jarboe. MCHS Collections #1993.53.1.

East Versus West

Little Falls, Minnesota

by Mary Warner

Published by the
Morrison County Historical Society
Little Falls, Minnesota
2014

*The essence of a free government consists in an
effectual control of rivalries. ~ John Adams*

Scuttlebutt

One of the hardest things to capture in the historic record, until recently, was scuttlebutt – the opinionated background chatter of locals regarding their communities and current events. With the advent of social media, comment sections are now rife with scuttlebutt, but there are ways to tease it out of past records. Take, for example, the long-running tension between the east and west sides of Little Falls.

In the early 1970s, I started kindergarten at Lincoln Elementary School on the west side of Little Falls. My parents were renting a house owned by Hennepin Paper Mill at the time, so Lincoln was the closest public school for me to attend. Midway through the year, they purchased a house about a half a block from the front doors of Lindbergh Elementary School on the east side of town, which meant switching schools. The scuttlebutt among kids was that west siders were not as good as east siders. It was a subtle thing that I didn't pay much attention to at the time, but as I grew older and started working at the Morrison County Historical Society (MCHS), the west/east split became more evident.

One of my high school friends, who attended Lincoln School longer than I did, mentioned feeling looked down upon by those on the east side. She said that local realtors actively attempted to steer home buyers away from houses on the west side. I've personally heard people say that there's nothing on the west side, indicating that the west side does not contribute economically toward Little Falls, even though the west side has historically had most of the large manufacturing businesses, including Pine Tree Lumber Company, Hennepin Paper Mill, and Larson Boats. It also has most of the tourist attractions in town, including The Charles A. Weyerhaeuser Memorial Museum, where I'm writing this article.

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During the course of my work at the Morrison County Historical Society, I've heard that in the past fist fights occurred between east and west siders on the bridge. While I've never been able to track down a source for this particular piece of scuttlebutt, since hearing it I've been on the lookout for documentation of the animosity between west and east siders. That documentation has been fairly easy to find, which means there's more to the east/west split than rumors.

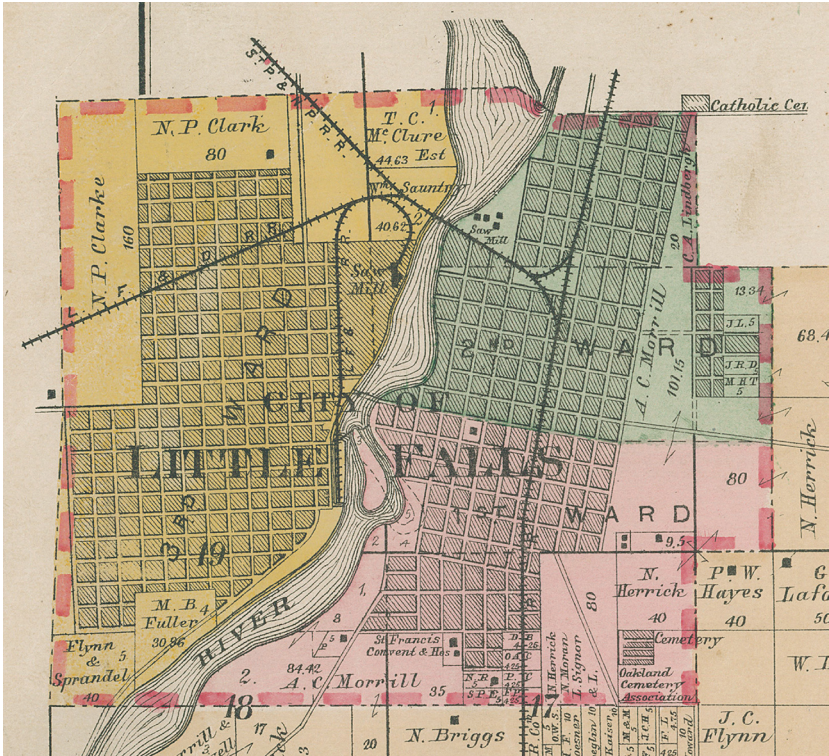
Mapping Little Falls

Let's start with some background on how Little Falls developed as a city. The very first plat of Little Falls was drawn in 1855 by surveyor R.B. Blake. At the time, the east side of Little Falls was in Benton County and that's where the east side plat was filed in September of that year. The west side of Little Falls was part of the newly established Todd County.

Minnesota Territory, which had formed in 1849, was rapidly being split up into counties as Indian lands were ceded through treaties. County boundary lines shifted over the early years, with the east side of Morrison County being split off Benton County and organized in February 1856. Morrison County gained the land on the west side of the Mississippi River through a series of political maneuvers over the next several years, finishing the land transfer by an act of the State Legislature in 1864.

R.B. Blake filed a plat of the west side of Little Falls in Stearns County on December 5, 1855. Why it was filed in Stearns County and not in Todd County is unclear, although perhaps it was because Blake was the Stearns County surveyor. What's most interesting about the plat is the name he gave the west side: Cob-ba-conse. This appears to be an alteration of the Ojibwe term for "in a place where there is a waterfall," originally spelled Kakabikang by the Reverend Frederic Baraga in "A Dictionary of the Otchipwe Language," and roughly translating as "little falls." (1) Most of the street names Blake used for his west side plat were of Indian tribes, including Winnebago, Sac, Sioux, and "Chipway". His east side streets, in contrast, were named for trees.

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1892 plat of Little Falls, MN, from "Plat Book of Morrison County, Minnesota," C.M. Foote & Co., Minneapolis, MN, 1892. This was the year that Little Falls changed its street names from trees and the alphabet to the numbered system still used. Oak Street became Broadway.

A brand new plat of Little Falls was drawn by Morrison County surveyor Samuel M. Putnam and filed in May 1856. Unlike the Blake plats of Little Falls and Cob-ba-conse, Putnam created cohesion between the two sides of town by drawing a grid that jumped the river and by naming the west/east streets the same on both sides. Like Blake's east side streets, Putnam used tree names. Both the 1855 and 1856 maps were made at the behest of the Little Falls Manufacturing Company, a firm owned by James Fergus, Calvin Tuttle, and William Sturgis. The purpose of the company was to harness the power generated by the waterfall, operate a sawmill, and build the town of

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**First air view of the west side of Little Falls, MN, 1927,
photo by Frank A. Nelson, Nelson's Studio.
MCHS Collections #1939.75.5**

Little Falls.

The platting of Little Falls didn't end with the Blake and Putnam maps. Much of Little Falls West, as it came to be called, is identified as Thayer's Addition. Thayer's Addition was platted June 8, 1888, around the time of the construction of the third dam in Little Falls, the one that led to a massive boom in industry in the town. George Thayer of Rochester, New York, "became owner of the water power property and much other land in this city and county early in the history of the village of Little Falls." (2) His sons, Samuel R. and George W. Thayer, took care of his property and eventually came to own it. Presumably, it was the Thayer family who paid to have the Thayer Addition replatted.

In 1889, Little Falls incorporated as a city, having been organized as a village in 1879. With the bustling growth of the town, in 1892 the City Council passed an ordinance to rename the streets, moving away from tree names on the east side and alphabetical names on the west

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**First air view of the east side of Little Falls, MN, 1927,
photo by Frank A. Nelson, Nelson's Studio.
MCHS Collections #1939.75.4**

side to a primarily numerical system, with Broadway running through the center of both sides. At that time the wagon bridge that spanned the Mississippi River in Little Falls, connecting the east and west sides, did not link up the two Broadways. It ran from Broadway on the east side to a spot somewhat north of Broadway on the west side.

A City of 50,000

The first city directory for Little Falls was published in 1892, with an introduction aflutter with excitement from the major growth the city had seen between 1890 and 1892, when the population went from 2,354 to 5,699. The directory extols the benefits of both sides of town:

“The public buildings and the business portion of Little Falls are located on the east side of the Mississippi river. On account of the water and the utilizing of same, the city will, of course, extend rapidly

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on the west side, but the old townsite on the eastern bank will always hold its own and keep up fully with the healthy growth of the west end. Little Falls is destined to be a great city; -- one of the leading manufacturing and railroad centers of the Northwest. Both sides will have their share of progress and the everlasting falls within a few years reflect the lights of a city numbering at least 50,000 inhabitants, located on both sides and extending far beyond the present city limits in all directions.” (3)

While the Board of Commerce and city leaders worked hard to build the west side manufacturing district, the rosy scenario of a city of 50,000 residents did not come to pass. The population peaked at 6,078 in 1910, then dropped to 5,500 in 1920, around the time Pine Tree Lumber Company closed operations in Little Falls. It would not break 7,000 inhabitants until about 1960, only reaching just over 8,000 inhabitants in 2005, after a portion of Belle Prairie Township was annexed.

Crossing the River

The city’s fortunes have been intimately tied to the Mississippi River, rising and falling with how the resource has been managed. A big part of the tension between the west and east sides of town comes from the physical act of crossing the river, a huge hurdle in the early days of settlement. The waterfall attracted people, but how could one cross the river safely when there was no bridge? Fording the river during low water and using canoes, rafts, or boats were the earliest methods of crossing. As more people made Little Falls their permanent home, a more reliable way was needed. A ferry was put in at Little Falls in the 1850s by William Sturgis, who became one of the co-partners in the Little Falls Manufacturing Company in 1854. (4)

The ideal river crossing is a bridge and a suspension bridge was constructed in 1857/58 by the Little Falls Manufacturing Company. “After about 8 or 9 years it was found to be rotting some, so the Board of County Commissioners had it repaired, but it was blown down by a heavy wind shortly afterwards.” (5) Once the bridge was gone, residents had to go back to using a ferry. “During the war of

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the rebellion, in about 1863, the ferry at Swan River ceased to exist which only left one ferry in the county, that being at Fort Ripley, which accommodated but very few of the settlers in the county. So, for several years, the principal crossing with teams during the summer season, was by fording at Swan River. The people becoming tired of that unpleasant and dangerous way of crossing the Father of Waters, petitioned the board of county commissioners for relief.” (6) Nathan Richardson started up the new ferry just north of Little Falls after receiving a license for it from the county board in 1868. His license was renewed in 1878.

A More Permanent Bridge

It should come as no surprise that Richardson, who stood to lose his ferry income, actively worked to stop the effort to construct a



Wrought iron combination truss bridge across the Mississippi River at Little Falls, MN, built by Keepers & Riddell of the Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Works Company in 1883/1884. Photo c. 1900.

MCHS Collections #0000.0.53

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bridge in 1883. In June of that year, the citizens of Morrison County voted to bond for the bridge, with 690 voting for the bonds and 434 voting against. (7) In July, the Board of County Commissioners voted to approve the bonds for the bridge and the contract was awarded to the Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Work Company. (8) In August, the Little Falls Board of Supervisors also issued bonds for the bridge (9) and work began the same month. The bridge was scheduled to be finished by November 15, 1883, (10) and construction was moving rapidly. The *Little Falls Sun* posted regular updates. By mid-October it reported, "The two bridge abutments are completed and also the pier, with the exception of the coping, which is daily expected. This leaves over thirty days to put up the superstructure. Hurrah for the bridge." (11)

Then the project was derailed. The bridge contractors, Keepers and Riddell of the Milwaukee Bridge and Iron Work Company, filed suit against the county for not paying them in full. The county further "Resolved that the twelve thousand dollars county bonds, issued by the board of county commissioners, of Morrison county, on the 2d day of June, A.D. 1883, be destroyed by fire, and they were then duly counted put in the stove and burned. Each of said bonds was of the amount of \$1,000, and were known as bridge bonds." (12) Work on the bridge

stopped due to litigation.

Scuttlebutt crept into the *Little Falls Sun* about the situation.

Schreiber's lake, as it is designated by the residents of Broadway west, is at present a beautiful expanse of water. This lake is not caused by the overflow of any stream or large body of water but by the topographical peculiarities of the street grade. A levee of sand has been raised on the north side of the lake upon which passers-by may walk. The lake itself is an unbroken expanse of water. The fishing in it is said to be good, while boating parties on it are becoming of daily occurrence.

*~ Little Falls Daily Transcript
October 23, 1906*

"This is the season of discontent for the residents of the west side of the river, who may have business in Little Falls. All this inconvenience may be charged directly to the account of a few individuals who have no

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particular interest in the matter, as they seldom have occasion to cross the river.” (13)

“While this works a hardship to both the people of Little Falls and those living on the west side of the river, there seems to be no course left but to make the best of a bad bargain. Of course it is only a farce on the part of those opposing the bridge, and will all be made right in the end if there is any justice in this free and enlightened county.” (14)

“We are informed that there is a lady residing on the east side who, for the nine years of her residence there, has not been across the river. She vows that she will not cross until she can do so on a bridge. We trust that the lady will be enabled to visit Little Falls in a short time.” (15)

The Board of County Commissioners worked out its differences with Keepers and Riddell, paying them eighty-five percent of their bill for work completed and extending their contract for a new completion date of May 1, 1884. (16) Work began again in earnest and the bridge was completed in March 1884. (17)

Since that time, there has continuously been a bridge through downtown Little Falls connecting the west and east sides. Once it was easy to cross the river, it seems as though it would be a fairly simple matter to build cohesion between the two sides of town. Unfortunately, a new barrier was erected in 1889 when the Northern Pacific Railroad built its Little Falls/Staples cut-off line along the west side of the river, effectively stopping traffic from crossing the bridge numerous times a

School teachers who travel from the west to the east side of the river daily seem to be having hard luck on the Broadway side walks leading to the bridge. Friday and Saturday, of last week, and this morning, teachers are known to have tripped on defective planks. This morning's victim was thrown quite forcibly to the pavement and severely bruised but was not hurt so badly but what she could take up her school duties.

*~ Little Falls Daily Transcript
September 17, 1900*

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day. This intermittent barrier, which remains in place to this day, is a perpetual source of aggravation to residents on both sides of the river. It also plays a role in how citizens use the town, including where events are held and buildings are constructed, leading to tension between the east and west sides.

Two Other Factors

In addition to mismatched development and problems crossing between the two sides of Little Falls, a couple of other factors have fomented the west/east schism.

While the east side of Little Falls has historically seen a mix of ethnicities, the west side was settled by a large number of Poles, who were sturdy, working-class people. Among the east siders were more professional workers. According to west sider Stan Wielinski, the east side was referred to as the “rich” side. Of course there were blue and white collar workers and rich and poor on both sides of town, and the west side had ethnicities other than the Polish, but ethnicity and class have contributed to the east/west split. To deny this misses an important part of the tension between the two sides.

With all of these factors in mind, let’s take a look at specific incidents that highlight the division.

Movement to Secede

In today’s political climate, it has become fashionable for people to suggest that their state secede from the union when they don’t like what the federal government is doing. Little Falls had its own secession movement in 1913, when west siders met to discuss “cut[ting] loose from the East side and [organizing] a city with \$500 liquor licenses.” (18) While the *Little Falls Daily Transcript* article regarding the secession movement assumed west siders weren’t serious, a *Little Falls Herald* article revealed a sincere reason for secession. “This movement has its start from the claim by the West siders that they are not given the improvements which they are entitled to, and some also lay it to the increase in liquor license fees.” (19)

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While people generally don't like to pay taxes, they get particularly annoyed when they feel their taxes aren't being spent fairly. The secession movement speaks to a feeling among west siders that city leaders were not responsive to the needs of their side of town. A number of examples of this unresponsiveness turned up in the local newspapers.

In July 1908, there was a problem with the cement crossing at Third Street and Third Avenue Southwest. "The crossing is nine inches below the sidewalk at both ends but the crown is on a level with the sidewalk. This makes an excellent grade when paving is put in, but the people who have to use this crossing say that they do not think that there will be any paving done in that part of the city for some time." (20)

West siders spoke to the City Council about this crossing and "requested to see that no more such crossings were allowed to be built in the residence district of the city," a strategy the council agreed with, but there is no mention in the newspaper report of the council meeting, or several meetings to follow, that the situation would be remedied. (21)

In April 1915, "[a] number of residents of the west side appeared before the council and urged that the water main, which was ordered laid on Second avenue southwest about a year and a half ago, be put in. Nothing was done in the matter and it is now up to the Water Power company to install the main as originally ordered." (22)

A June 1916 headline screamed, "The West Siders Are Up In Arms: Residents Justly Object to Conditions West of the N.P. Freight Depot – State That They Have Complained Repeatedly Without Getting Relief." What were west siders dealing with? A "foul smelling, disease-breeding, low swamp hole" near the Northern Pacific Depot that was delivering the contents of an outhouse to their yards. "They claim that they have sent word to the health officer, but that no attention has been paid to their complaints." (23)

The same month, there was a request by Mayor G.M.A. Fortier to the Little Falls City Council for an extra police officer on the west side. An article explained why the officer was needed:

"Hoboes are flocking into the city from all directions at this time of

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the year and both men are kept busy all night with them. It is said that women left alone in their homes on the West side have been molested. Many arrests are being made, enough to keep the police busy all their time and Special Officer Friesinger says he hardly has time to sleep. Besides the hoboos, there are many who buy tickets here who are undesirable and must be driven out of town.” (24)

The hiring of an extra officer was discussed by the Little Falls City Council during the next couple of meetings. Even though there was a petition signed by west siders in favor of the extra officer, the council flatly refused to make a decision, with one council member saying “he does not believe the signers of the petition were serious.” (25) The council told the mayor he was responsible for paying for officers and that he could appoint one if he wanted, but without council approval. “It was also pointed out that if the council allowed the mayor another regular policeman he might get the idea that he needed still another and could still appoint a special every 48 hours, as he is doing now.” (26) It's difficult to ascertain whether Mayor Fortier appointed a police officer for the west side as bills for city business following this meeting show a number of special police officers being paid, but the



St. Adalbert's Catholic Church, Little Falls, MN, undated.

MCHS Collections #1979.16.39

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indifference of city leaders to west side concerns made secession seem like a good idea. (27)

A Tale of Two Polish Churches

West side Polish Catholics felt ignored in another important aspect of their lives. In the late 1890s, there was discussion about starting a Polish Catholic parish in Little Falls to join the French Catholic Church, St. Francis Xavier, and the German Catholic Church, Sacred Heart. The biggest point of contention was the location of the church.

“A few of the people favored a location on the west side of the river, since most of the Polish speaking farmers lived there. Others favored a location on the east side, since it was the more developed and more populous part of the town. Of those who wanted the church on the east side, some suggested a location near the present post office, and they could argue that it was at least nearer the west side than any



Our Lady of Lourdes Catholic Church, Little Falls, MN, photo postcard published by The L.L. Cook Co., Milwaukee, WI, 1942.

MCHS Collections #0000.626.1

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other site would be. Some suggested a location in the northeastern part of town, and could argue that land was cheaper there. And others suggested the location on seventh street south, the location eventually chosen.” (28)

The resulting east side Polish Catholic church was Saint Adalbert’s, which was dedicated in October 1901 and was so far away from the river that west side Polish Catholics continued in their quest to erect a parish and church on their side of town. In April 1900, they purchased three lots, “located on Fourth street between Third and Fourth avenues southwest” (29) and started hauling rock for the foundation. This effort never got further than the foundation and the west side Poles continued to long for their own church for 17 years. In 1917, they purchased the Antlers Hotel and used it as their church until construction of Our Lady of Lourdes Church was completed in 1923. The hotel continued to serve as a school for the parish until it was torn down in 1952. (30, 31, 32, 33)

Barriers to Shopping

Part of the east/west split can be attributed to a language barrier. According to Stan Wielinski, his grandmother was more comfortable speaking Polish than English, particularly while doing her grocery shopping. There were several small grocery stores on the west side when Stan was growing up. A number of them were run by Poles who could understand his grandmother. If she had to visit a shop where Polish wasn’t spoken, she’d bring a family member so she could get her point across. She avoided shopping on the east side, where she couldn’t be certain of being understood.

Along with the language barrier keeping west siders shopping on their side of town, Stan said that the attitude among adults when he was a kid was that “if you lived on the west side, you shopped on the west side, rather than go across the river.” (34) His mother worked on the east side of the river, but only shopped on the west side.

When Green’s Red Owl was open, it was convenient to buy on the west side. Now that there is no grocery store on the west side, people have to travel to Coborn’s or Walmart on the east side to buy groceries,

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or purchase them from a convenience store at high prices. If a west sider times his trip to the grocery store wrong, he'll be stuck in traffic at the end of school or the work day, or have to wait for a train. Stan said that at such times it's easier to go to Gosch's grocery store in Randall 10 miles away than get across town.

A Tale of Two Creameries

A 1924 letter from real estate agent John Vertin to Little Falls land owner Fritz Malmstrom of Chicago, Illinois, discusses another east/west rivalry:

"The farmers are about to build a Co-operative Creamery, and they have purchased a site on 2nd street northeast, just one block north of the courthouse, 80x150 foot lot for \$2500.00, but there is some dissatisfaction as to the location of it. The patrons from the west side of the river are rather dissatisfied with the location and there is some movement on foot by them to form another co-operative creamery on the west side of the river. And from a business standpoint, it would be a very poor policy to build two creameries, as it would be harder for them to make a success than if they were combined in one creamery. So some of the business men are trying to bring the two factions together. We figure if the creamery could be located near the bridge that would satisfy the west side patrons." (35)

The Farmers' Co-operative Creamery Association was founded in Little Falls in March 1916 and purchased Frank Moore's creamery



Land O' Lakes Creamery, Little Falls, MN, undated.
MCHS Collections #0000.0.131

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on the east side of Little Falls near the dam. In 1923, the association began looking for a location to build a new creamery. A number of locations, most of them on the east side, were being



**West Side Co-operative Creamery, Little Falls, MN, c. 1924.
MCHS Collections #2000.27.3**

considered. (36) In March 1924, a site at the corner of Second Street and First Avenue Northeast was selected. (37)

The two factions were not brought together and in April 1924, the West Side Co-operative Creamery Association formed, starting operations in the Engstrom creamery on the west side. (38) The Farmers' Co-operative Creamery became part of Land O' Lakes in about 1921 and operated until 1962. (39) The West Side Co-operative Creamery merged with Mid-America Dairymen Inc. in August 1970 and continued operating until May 1971. (40) As the Land O' Lakes Creamery ran for 46 years and the West Side Co-operative Creamery ran for 47 years, both appeared to find success, one on each side of the river.

The Birth of a New Organization

If it seems from these examples that the west/east split is a thing of the dim and dusty past, think again. In 2002, another chasm developed between the two sides of town over the Little Falls Arts & Crafts Fair. The fair, which had been held annually since 1972, had grown to

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receive approximately 100,000 visitors per year, with vendor booths spread throughout downtown on both sides of the river. After the 2002 fair, Jeff Tschida, manager of the West Side Bar, presented a petition from west side fair vendors to the Little Falls City Council. “The petition included three concerns that the vendors wanted addressed: there was no shuttle bus service to the west side; there were no garbage cans on the west side, and; the Chamber [of Commerce] office on the west side was closed.” (41)

After discussion by the Chamber of Commerce’s Arts and Crafts Fair Committee, which was in charge of planning the event, committee members recommended to the City Council “that the 2003 fair should have vendors only on the city’s east side.” The committee provided a list of reasons for its decision, including providing better access to vendors, customers and businesses, and making it safer for people by not having them cross the railroad tracks. West side business owners hotly disagreed with the committee’s reasoning. (42)

Interestingly, in a Morrison County Record article discussing the kerfuffle, the division between the two sides of town was directly addressed.

“The fact that the Little Falls City Council does not want a divided city – even though a river and railroad tracks divide it into a west side and east side – became quite evident Monday evening when members unanimously voted to table a decision on giving the Chamber of Commerce a license to hold its 31st annual Arts and Crafts Fair next September. Behind the decision was the Chamber’s refusal to reverse its decision to limit the vendors to the city’s east side.

“As discussed at their planning meeting, the council members expressed their thoughts that the city was far more united now than in the past when, as in an example given, members of a west side church would have little to do with members of an east side church. “And now the Chamber is trying to divide the city again,” said one.” (43)

Chamber Board President Jeff Kruschek, who insisted this “was not an east side-west side issue,” indicated that the Chamber’s decision was based on safety and economics. He said, “It will be less expensive if we don’t have to furnish the west side with police, toilets and garbage containers on the west side.” (44)

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In direct response to the issue, west siders created a new organization, the West Side Improvement Association, “to make improvements in the community with its focus on the west side of Little Falls.” (45)

After wrangling over rewriting the city’s large event ordinance, the City Council eventually issued licenses to both the Chamber of Commerce and the West Side Improvement Association for their events. The Chamber would host the Arts and Crafts Fair as usual, finally deciding to continue putting vendors on the west side; and the West Side Improvement Association would host its first Antiques and Collectibles Fair in Le Bourget Park. (46) Both events were deemed successful by their organizers. (47)

Fist Fights

Although there have been plenty of contentious issues between the west and east sides of Little Falls, thus far I’ve found no evidence of anyone coming to fisticuffs over their disagreements. In trying to get to the bottom of this rumor, I spoke to

Complaints come loudly condemning the pig-headedness of the council in ordering out the street lights. This move falls hardest on the people of the west side of the river and east of the railroad track. People still remember attempted holdups on the river bridge near the tracks before the days of electric lights, and when the city was less than one-third its present size, and hence had much less of the bum element to pray on the public under cover of darkness. This move of refusing to continue the light service on any terms, pending litigation, is offering a premium on burglary, highway robbery and arson. Men who have places of business down town which requires their attention evenings, and who live in the remote parts of the city, are at the mercy of tramps and thugs, on their way home. The M. M. M. (Martin, Mecusker, Moeglein) gang is trying to punish Fuller at the expense of the city.

*~ Morrison County Democrat
June 11, 1896*

Could an article like this have led to stories about fist fights on the bridge? Or is there more documentation to be found?

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east sider Fred Larson. While he had heard as a child that if he went to the west side he'd get beat up, it never happened to him, even though he often rode his bike to Lindbergh State Park on the west side. (48)

Stan Wielinski heard the same sort of thing as a child. It was supposedly safer for a west side kid to take the Broadway bridge to the ball park at the fairgrounds, rather than take the railroad trestle and risk running into an east sider who would cause trouble. While west side boys didn't date east side girls, and vice versa, he didn't actually see much open conflict between kids from the two sides of town. He was more likely to see kids from Lincoln School, the public elementary on the west side, beating up country kids from Our Lady of Lourdes Church school. (49)

Fred summed up the situation regarding fist fights between the two sides as being "more fiction than truth." (50)

Easing the Tension

It is not the intention of this essay to provoke further feelings of ill will between the west and east sides of Little Falls. Just the opposite. By understanding what has gone on between the two sides from an historic perspective, it is hoped that when tension arises that appears to be a repetition of past reactions and behaviors, the parties involved will step back and acknowledge the previous slights in order to move forward in a more productive way.

Mayor Nathan Richardson did just that in 1896 when he allowed west siders to choose their own policeman, rather than appointing one himself. According to the Transcript, "[Richardson did] not think it exactly proper that an East side man should be appointed and sent over there." (51) At a public meeting, west siders chose Jake Mrozek as their police officer. (52) Mrozek had already been serving in this role, but each time a new mayor was elected, annually at that point, police officers were appointed. Because the City Council was considering reducing the size of the police force, there was a good chance the mayor would appoint someone else or cut the position altogether. Richardson, being one of the early settlers of the county and the first mayor of Little Falls, understood the dynamics between the two sides

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of town and had the good sense to work with citizens rather than against them.

We could all use a little of Uncle Nate's wisdom.



Little Falls Police Force, 1890. Chief Thomas Bailey, seated. Standing from left to right, Jake Mrozik, the west side officer, John Roy, and William Tourtillot.

MCHS Collections #1968.18.3

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Other Rivalries?

While the focus of this essay has been on the episodic rivalry between the west and east sides of Little Falls, there are many other rivalries within Morrison County. Some are between communities, some between rural residents and those in the county seat, some between sports teams, and etc.

If you have stories of county-related conflicts ...

Write an email: mocohistory@gmail.com,

Send a letter: Morrison County Historical Society, PO Box 239,
Little Falls, MN 56345,

Or contribute an essay on the subject to our “What’s It Like [...] in Morrison County?” project: <http://morrisoncountyhistory.org/whatsitlike/>.

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Sources

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