

Our Eastside Hill Heritage | Part 3: Easthill Businesses

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In a previous installment it was noted that the major challenge facing people who chose to live in the Second Ward

was “The Hill.” Initial grading of the East Hill was done on Eau Claire Street, and by 1880, East Grand Avenue, formerly known as Kelsey Street, also provided a route from downtown to our neighborhood. The 1862 Business Directory showed only one business on the hill, that of John W. French, a blacksmith. His business was located either on the corner of Doty and Main Streets or Doty and Kelsey Streets, depending on your source. The 400 block of Doty Street was also the location of the first city jail, built in 1859.



In January 1874, it was noted in a local newspaper that Eau Claire held the title of “Fastest Growing City in Wisconsin” for 1873. Unfortunately, the difficulty in conquering and grading the East Side Hill contributed to a much slower growth rate than in other wards of the city.

By the turn of the century, other problems loomed for our burgeoning community. The lumber boom of the 1870 to 1900 era became a lumber bust as the pineries yielded their last harvests. The transition from lumber town to a manufacturing hub had begun, and by 1904 Eau Claire manufacturers were producing paper, sulfite, furniture, furs, boxes, candy, meat products, beer, mattresses, linen goods, shingles, and a variety of other goods. Businesses began to flourish, and some of the East Hill businesses, people, and establishments included (in no particular order) the following:

Herman Bluedorn, who established his florist shop and gardens in 1882, was one of the best known East Hill businessmen. His home was located at 604 Gray Street and his son, Ernest, continued with Bluedorn Florist until his retirement during the 1960s. The original greenhouse on the East Hill had been established in 1872 by Carl Magdalerna Dinger. Later it was sold to Fred H. Gadsby, and resold later to A.F.T Lauritzen, who ran the business for 49 years.

Another prominent East Hill Businessman was Ole Falstad, who operated a meat market at 411 Talmadge Avenue from about 1890 until 1936. Herbert Francis, born in Eau Claire in 1875, opened a grocery store on Chauncey Street and Barland in 1914. Before that he had served as principal of both the Third Ward and Tenth Ward schools.

John Moen came to Eau Claire from Norway in 1880. A mason and bricklayer, he owned and operated a store on Barland Street for 15 years, and one on the corner of Main and Dodge Streets for 20 years.

Many other Eau Claire businesspeople lived on the East Hill but operated businesses elsewhere in the community. John Osterman, of Osterman Transfer, built his home at 402 Doty Street. John H. Fleming, father of Thomas F. Fleming and grandson of John Bernard Fleming, the first mayor of Eau Claire,

served as Alderman for 15 years, co-owned Fleming Jewelers, and built his home at 707 Gray Street in 1913.

Walter Lobb lived at 203 Doty Street and operated the commercial warehouse on Dewey and Gibson Streets. His daughter, Dr. Lois Lobb, was a clinical psychiatrist who practiced in Eau Claire for three years.

Hugo A. Ludwig, a tailor by trade, came from Germany in 1884 to apprentice to John Hanck. He and his wife Alma lived at 410 Doty Street and later operated Ludwig and Sons Jewelers. Hanck and his wife once operated a small grocery at the same location.

Daniel Harrington, an engineer with the Eau Claire Lumber Company, came to Eau Claire in 1857. His family home was located at 314 Doty Street. Charles Hiller, owner and operator of the Unique Theatre at 411 S. Barstow Street, resided at 317 Main Street.