'Everybody Knows Everybody'

By WALTER FLAHERTY

They used to call us South Madison. We were a suburb of Madison, but our citizens voted in the town of Madison, which annexed us.

After we joined the city in 1913 we became known, and still are, as "the South Side." More accurately and officially speaking, we're the 14th Ward.

The State Journal annual edition published in 1912 described us as a sleepy growing suburb with a "measles" population of about 400. Now our ward has a population of 3,000 and at least 2,500 more residents live beyond the limits of what once was South Madison.

In that publication of 37 years ago we boasted of our several manufacturing establishments, which was the Badger Slate Shoe factory, operated by Osklen and Atkins, and the Madison branch of the Battle Creek Sanitarium. Construction with expectations that the building would be completed and opened early in 1913.

The greatest attraction of the year for residents of the locality was the Monona Lake assembly, and the Dane county fairgrounds, recently located close to the South Madison railroad, were said to be among the finest in the state.

We had a two-room grade school with 16 pupils and two teachers.

We had the promise of a streetcar line that extended to the assembly grounds and possibly "clear around the lake." Only part of this promise materialized. The streetcar line came out Lake side but as far as the fair grounds. The contact around the lake remained an unfulfilled dream.

Today we are a community of 6,000 families, more closely knit into a "city within a city" in which everybody knows everybody else and neighborhood spirit is manifested amply in our "South Side Association." A glance back over the years reveals that the most remarkable change has come about since South Madison was annexed to the city.

Prior to that time we had gas and electric lights for our homes, no imprinted streets, no street lights, no sidewalks, no water system, no sewerage or other sanitary facilities. Now we have all of these, with 25 to 30 concrete streets and a modern 16-room school with 500 to 400 pupils.

A half century ago Park st. was the only thoroughfare leading southward and access to the eastern border of South Madison was gained only by way of the "Water Curve" road which followed the line of what is now one of the principal streets and then cut back to Lakeside.

The western half of Lakeside was corduroyed, but the western half was only a crush of speed limits and the back streets were filled in and paved macadamized. When the street cars came in 1906 the rails were laid over the old macadam and the sides of the streets were built up and repaved.

S. Park st. or the "Owen's road," the only entrance way to the city from the south, was a poor highways in which the bottom had a habit of "doubling out" in wet weather or the cold snow of the present site of No. 6 link station. Winding resulting for construction purposes "dug" their homes when they become flooded frequently at this spot or were washed away by corn shocks, barnyard manure and other materials to make the road passable for the loads of sand.

It was not until 1913, representing a view from the old Lakeside Water Curve on the south side of the lake, that the street was built and this ultimately led to the building of the Southside Water Curve on the north side of the lake.

An artist's conception of Madison's skyline in 1885, representing a view from the old Lakeside Water Curve on the south side of Lake Monona.

Southside calls itself a city within a city.

Today's Madison skyline and its reflection in the calm waters of Monona bay as seen by residents of the south side.

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