

#40

RECOLLECTIONS OF A FORMER MADISON STREET  
COMMISSIONER

Respectfully submitted by: James A. Brophy

October, 1989

A. G. Schmedeman -  
1926-1932  
Resigned Dec. 1, 1932

James R. Law -  
1932-1943  
Elected Nov. 30, 1932  
Resigned Dec. 10, 1943

F. Halsey Kraege -  
1943-1947  
Elected Dec. 10, 1943  
Acting City Manager -  
Apr. 15 - Sept. 15, 1947

Leonard Howell -  
City Manager  
1947-1950  
Elected Sept. 15, 1947  
Resigned July 31, 1950

George Forster -  
1951 Resigned Oct. 16, 1955

A. W. Bareis (INTERIM)  
Oct. 16, 1955 - April 17, 1956

Ivan Nestingen  
1956 Resigned Jan. 31, 1961

Harold E. Hanson (INTERIM)  
Feb. 3, 1961 - April 18, 1961

Henry Reynolds  
1961-1965

Otto Festge  
1965-1969

William Dyke  
1969-1973

Paul R. Soglin  
1973-1979

Joel Skornicka  
1979-1983

F. Joseph Sensenbrenner, Jr.  
1983-1989

Paul R. Soglin  
1989-

Received FROM Deloris Mueller ASST CITY CLERK  
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## MADISON, WISCONSIN - 1930-1976

After a good deal of thought and hesitation, I have decided to give a brief report on the working and planning of many daily assignments performed by the Street and Sanitation employees in the early 1930's through the year, 1976.

In my research I am not sure where recollection ends and conjecture begins. However, I must complete this part of Madison's service to its citizens with the hope that it will shed light on what we have learned from the past and improve in the future for the following generations.

I feel my family history will add a little color to this report, since my retirement office at 136 Proudfit Street provided me with a good deal of early Madison family living, dating back to the marriage of my maternal grandmother and grandfather, Ellen P. Caglan and Thomas J. Higgins, November 22, 1857 in Saint Raphael's Church, Madison, Wisconsin.

In the early 1860's, they built a home on Lot 21 in the Warrens Addition and Monona Bay subdivision. The house number was 136 Monona Street. It was changed sometime shortly after 1906 to 136 Proudfit Street. A new house was constructed in the late 1870's and completed in the early 1880's. The kitchen part of the house was made from the old structure and the rest of the material to complete the building, as it stands today, was furnished by local merchants. The basement walls are eighteen inches thick

and were built from local quarry stone and mortar.

My mother remembered when Monona Bay was the backyard with cattails forming the view from the kitchen windows. The property has remained in the family for over one hundred and twenty-five years. In order to make light of the times, the cattails were used in the making of women's corsets.

The pedestrian traffic from this area was provided with high board walks so residents could reach the grocery stores in the 500 block of West Main Street and the Capitol Square. Other prominent gathering places were the saloons on West Main Street and Gillett's Barber Shop. Monona Street would become impassible for horse drawn wagons delivering groceries, and other supplies such as milk, coal, wood etc. during the winter and spring frost break up.

In reviewing this cover letter, I do not wish to slight the other half of my heritage by omitting my paternal grandfather and grandmother. Martin Brophy Senior was born in County Cork, Ireland, March 14, 1827 and died in Madison, Wisconsin, April 16, 1903. Catherine McCarthey was born in 1838, also in Ireland and died in Madison, Wisconsin, June 14, 1906. They were married in Saint Raphael's Church by Reverend Etschman on June 7, 1865. They resided on Spring Street, between Orchard Street and Randall Avenue after their marriage.

HISTORY OF REFUSE AND GARBAGE COLLECTION AND DISPOSAL  
DURING THE EARLY 1900'S THROUGH THE MID 1930'S

The City of Madison collected garbage from hotels, restaurants and hospitals daily or as needed... Many small restaurants required only two collections per week. The semi liquid garbage was unwrapped and called "slop garbage" (layman's term). Two trucks were assigned to this collection service, making one or more trips to the disposal site each day. One truck was a special made Grasper unit with mounted reservoir body constructed to permit liquids to flow along the bottom, where drainage screw plugs could be removed at the disposal site prior to unloading. The remaining solid waste was disposed of by engaging the hoist cylinder valve that raised the body. The other truck was a four wheel drive International truck with a heavy duty reinforced body that also permitted the liquids to settle to the bottom of the leak proof unit. This unit was also equipped with cab controlled hoist levers that permitted the raising of the body at the disposal point. Both of these trucks had neumatic tires, instead of solid rubber caps, mounted on wooden wheels that other trucks of that period used.

The City of Madison common Council adopted an ordinance after 1915 requiring bids to be taken for the disposal of all garbage that would be hauled to the successful bidder's farm. The bids were for a period of five years. During my years with the city, Dr. J. P. West was the low bidder. It is

my recollection that a figure of \$13,500 per year was the approved bid by the common council during that time.

The large steel feeding barn on Dr. J. P. West's farm measured about two hundred feet and approximately one hundred feet wide. Sliding metal doors opened on one side of the building. I believe there were ten to twelve bays for dumping the garbage hauled by both trucks and ten to twelve horse drawn wagons. These bay doors were about twelve feet high and twelve feet wide. They were located on the south side of the building. This steel structure was built with the bay door side about fifteen feet above the concrete floor below. The horse drawn wagons, with the gondola side discharge feature, would pull up parallel to the building and when the trip was activated the wrapped garbage would fall to the concrete floor below.

When the hogs would hear the bay doors open, they would run full speed to be the first for dinner. Many times more than one gondola wagon would unload at the same time, thereby covering up some of the hogs that were feeding, then other hogs would walk on top and trample those below.

The residential garbage pick up rules required wrapping, but it was not uncommon or unusual for citizens to put can tops, broken bottles and other wastes in their garbage cans. It was not a pleasant sight to see hogs die when can covers or glass would get caught in their throats. I believe the Humane Society may have been responsible for the outlawing of feeding household garbage to hogs even though these hogs were

not used for human consumption.

When Dr. J. P. West was no longer feeding hogs household garbage, he called John G. Thompson (~~City Street~~ <sup>City</sup> ~~Commissioner~~ <sup>ENGINEER</sup>) for an appointment to discuss the future of the land he owned in the Cherokee Marsh Area. This occurred during the term of Mayor Ivan Nestigen and landfill disposal was the way to dispose of waste material. Dr. West met with Mr. Thompson, Mr. B.L. Gill (City Purchasing Agent), and myself (James A. Brophy) on several occasions. Dr. West felt the City of Madison should buy his entire holdings to safeguard the wet lands in Cherokee plat and Lake Mendota. Somehow, the city planning department was reluctant to pursue an aggressive plan and thereby recommend purchase. Dr. West was interested in the sale of his land with a small down payment and the balance to be paid over ten years.

I believe, as did many others including the mayor, that the City of Madison was missing the boat in not negotiating a contract with Dr. West. However, hindsight is always questionable, but I do believe that Dr. West had the city's best interest rather than his own in mind when he made the offer.

The city employed laborers that were assigned to private teamsters who picked up residential garbage. Each man carried two pails and emptied the garbage cans, usually from the rear of houses or alleys and in turn dumped them into the gandola wagons. The teamsters, on residential routes, made one trip per day to the hog farm (located on Wheeler Road

and Sherman Avenue). It took as much time for teams picking up the West side of Madison to go to and from Dr. West's farm as it took to pick up a load of garbage.

1930 to 1933 the City of Madison provided a Spring refuse collection service to all residential areas. Many areas in the more affluent neighborhoods hired private teamsters periodically to haul their waste material. With the advent of the City's Spring Refuse collection, every street was littered with ashes, cans, bottles and yard waste. Needless to say this restricted travel until the waste materials were removed. The waste was shoveled into horse drawn wagons or into a few late 1920 model vintage trucks for removal to the disposal site. This practice was discontinued after an exhaustive study by several city departments in 1932. Prior to this time much of the neighborhood waste found its way onto low vacant lots in many areas of the city. The owners of such lots were more often than not cognizant of the practice.

The Refuse Collection System was started in 1933 after an extensive study requested by Mayor, Albert Schmederman, the Common Council and the Board of Health under the supervision Dr. Bowman and Dr. Damagalla and the Fire Department Inspectors. This was prompted by the increase in the fire insurance rates.

The program was approved under Mayor Law and directed by Roman (Kibo) Brumm, the newly appointed Street Commissioner. Under Kibo's direction I worked at putting the collection



system together and equalizing the routes, so the number of household units would correspond to the manpower and equipment assigned daily to provide the necessary service to each ward. The areas used for disposal were generally marginal low lands that could be used for expanded park or recreational purposes.

The areas included the following lands:

1. The Harloff property on Olin Avenue. This property was finally purchased from the Harlott family during Mayor Ivan Nestigen's term in office.
2. Burr Jones Field - 1800 East Washington Avenue
3. Fordem Avenue Frontage off East Johnson Street which abutted the railroad tracks and was operated jointly with Madison Gas and Electric Company.
4. Olbrich Park area bounded by Sugar Avenue and and Atwood Avenue then Walter Avenue and the railroad tracks.
5. Wingra Street off Mills Street toward Orchard Street.
6. Truax Field was used jointly with the Oscar Mayor packing plant both as a burning disposal site and then converted to the sanitary landfill operation. This area comprised a number of low lying acres with ingress and egress from Packers Avenue.
7. The old vacated Stone Quarry off University Avenue between the city limits and Shorewood.

IS HE SAYING THIS WKS IN THE TOWN AT THE TIME?

WHO OWNS IT NOW? SHOREWOOD? DOES THIS IS A MARKET SOURCE? →

8. MARKET SOURCE 9. OLBRICH PARK  
One of the disposal areas that today provides re-

creational, park and East High School with football practice fields, track and related events is in my estimation one of the best investments dollarwise that the city of Madison and the Madison School System participated in together. I believe the sports program would have been severely limited without the additional acres reclaimed. The foresight of such people as Superintendent of Schools, Phil Falk, made the reclamation project a success.

These burning disposal sites were a nuisance to neighbors and the city officials, both elected and appointed.

The area comprising Madison Square was planned for residential development, in fact sanitary sewer mains had been constructed in the early 1920's, but for some reason building plans never developed. These sewer lines were removed prior to the city's filling the land with refuse. The area was low and mostly peat bogs supporting cat tails as well as other forms of wild life such as ducks, pheasants, musk rats, red wing blackbirds and numerous other inhabitants.

The area from Third Street to Sixth Street was filled starting July 17th, 1953. The only area where refuse was not permitted was one hundred and fifty feet from the back of houses facing Hoard Street and Upham Street. The property owners affected paid a portion of the cost of earth filling for the rear yard areas. This was a safeguard. A great deal of credit for the entire project should go to Alderman George Reger, who I accompanied in contacting each resident at their homes to get feedback and minimize complaints. Without diligent prodding, the project would have failed, and only his foresight and courage made the improvement what it is today. The projected timetable was fifteen to twenty years.

There is no question that the land values doubled after the filling was completed. Each day the refuse was compacted and covered with earth.

The refuse operation along Lake Monona from Blount Street to Broca Street (1935) was another success story.

This project was a particularly dangerous operation since we were filling the area along the Northwestern and Chicago Milwaukee and Saint Paul Railroad tracks and Lake Monona. The lake shore, prior to the city's decision to fill, was occupied by a number of boat houses - that provided cover for the small fishing boats and some very expensive motorized launches. The squatters were served notice to remove these structures by a certain date. Many ignored the city's order and when I was assigned a crew of men to start dismantling the buildings, things really heated up. I was thrown into the lake two times the first day by angry boat owners. Thereafter, police were available to maintain order.

The shoreline and lake bottom weeds and sediment held in suspension were a sight to see as we gradually dumped refuse into the water. We discovered very early in the operation that it would be necessary to find some way of controlling floating debris, since paper, cans etc. would float into the lake. This was not only unsightly, but also unacceptable to Madison citizens.

The city took bids on piling poles to drive down into the lake bed. These poles were grown in the state of Washington and were forty to fifty feet in length. These poles were driven into the lake bottom through the use of a pile driver, which was mounted on a barge (furnished by Reynolds Transfer Co.) . Chicken wire was attached to the poles. Approximately two feet of the wire was submerged with

three feet visible above the water. The refuse was compacted with a tractor, then covered with about one foot of earth. The tractor operator had to worry about sections of the fill breaking away and thus becoming a floating island. This could have happened with the tractor on top of the section of fill that would float.

We were constantly being monitored by the State Department of Natural Resources. The monitoring was very easy for them since their office windows overlooked Lake Monona and with little or no effort they could review the state of affairs on a daily basis.

AND PROUDFIT

The portion of the Lakeshore between Broom Street was filled with good base material. With the completion of the filling along the shoreline, the city was able to redesign Proudfit Street, Northshore Drive past Bedford Street and connect Law Park Drive by the tennis courts near Broom Street. Highway 151 now connects West Washington with East Washington Ave as envisioned by John Nolan's plan, submitted to the City of Madison City Fathers in 1911.

The portion of John Nolan Drive from Broom Street - North Shore Drive and the Chicago Northwestern tracks to Olin Avenue was opened to vehicle traffic in 1966. There was some feeling by some members of the the Board of Public Works that we should design the bridge to span the entire bay. However, due to the original cost of construction, Mayor Henry Reynolds supported the plan and the common council adopted the construction as it is today. (One

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million and a little bit more.) This figure was quoted many times prior to the bid proposals.

The letter dated May 16, 1989 confirms the timetable leading to the completion of the entire project. Mr. Herb Hellen, City Engineer provided the detailed report.

FAX TRANSMISSION

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Representing: WDNR - SOUTHERN DIST

From: JIM BACHHUBER

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