

My Memory Lane

I hope that it's not too soon, after this fine breakfast and at this relatively early hour in the day, for you to be receptive to the suggestion of taking a short trip with me. It's the kind of trip we all take, no doubt, from time to time and the nice thing about trips of this type is that they can be taken without having to worry about reservations, packing and a myriad of other planning details. Trips like the one we'll share can be taken by ourselves or with another, and the best thing about them is that we don't even have to leave the comforts of our easy chairs. Our trip is one down my "Memory Lane" as seen through the eyes of an eight year old lad. Probably all of us have at least one of these "lanes" that is either real or imagined. My "Memory Lane" is one that really does exist—it did when I was a youngster and it still does today, though it has significantly changed from those earlier years. My "Memory Lane" is Douglas Avenue bounded on the West by the west bank of the Arkansas River and on the East by St. Francis Avenue.

I'm one of those, not too common, native born Wichitans and I love this city. With the exception of my service time during World War II and a few years during the "sixties", I've been privileged to live here. It bothers me to hear folks bad-mouth the city. Rightly or wrongly, it seems to me that the folks who are the most critical of the city are the ones who have never lived anywhere else. Since there are no more Gardens of Eden, you can find whatever you are looking for—either the good or the bad in a place.

My home during the early years of my life was located on the west side of the 200 block on North St. Francis, directly across the street from the Coleman Company. It was only a three-room house that rented for \$13.00 per month. It was "graced" with gas lights and a shared outhouse. The stool could be flushed, I hasten to add. I thought our small house was a great place to live in and why? Because it was located so near to Douglas Avenue where most of the action in the city occurred.

So, won't you please join me? We'll start our trip on the west bank of the Arkansas River just to the north of Douglas, then retrace our steps back to Douglas and on east across the bridge to St. Francis. Along the way, I'll attempt to create a very brief word picture for you of my "lane" as it was during those "Roaring Twenties" and the "Depressed Thirties". As a pint-sized

tour guide, my caveat is that while I'm quite comfortable with the essential details that I'll be passing along to you, I'd be remiss if I didn't also admit that my memory does not let me give you complete details as we travel along our hoped for, "merry way."

Here in the summertime, one of the big, eagerly awaited things I like to do is to go to a baseball game. We're in luck because there is a game this afternoon so we'll start our walk here on the west bank of the Arkansas River just to the north of Douglas at a site known as "Island Park." The south end of the island is about even with the north wall of the Broadview Hotel. The wooden stadium and ball diamond just about covers the whole island. It is fortunate that the island is not accessible by car, because it's size is too small to provide parking accommodations. See those two parallel rail trestles crossing the river. One is for trains and the other is for street cars. Since it costs a whole nickel to ride on the trolley, Mom lets me ride either to or from the ball park. And, I can have a bottle of pop, too, but not at the ball park because the concession stand charges a dime for a bottle and you can buy it for a nickel on the "outside". By the way, my favorite pop is Nehi cream soda.

Mom and I go to ball games only on "Ladies Day" when all ladies are admitted free. It's very obvious that our afternoon's entertainment costs very little. The wooden benches in the grandstand are hard, but considering the admission cost "who's complaining?". Our ball team is a member of the Western Association. I don't remember what the team is called, but one of the most popular players is the right fielder, who is nicknamed "Strawberry" Bliss because of his red complexion. I think that he's the leading home run hitter of the team.

We're walking south back to Douglas and east across the bridge. We can see all the way to the railroad station viaduct, that is about a mile to the east of us. Just look at all of those wires! They're running above the curbs, down the middle and across the street. There are the electric and telephone lines paralleling both sides of the street, the grids of wires needed to furnish the electricity to the street cars that run in both directions and the cables that stretch diagonally from each corner of and across the intersections. They support the single traffic signal that is suspended in the middle of each intersection. When we have a parade, it's difficult for the really tall floats to avoid hitting at least one of the wires in that web of wire. You can also see that with vertical parking of both sides of the street, the double set of trolley tracks, and those raised,

cement islands in the middle for the safety of trolley riders, that steering automobiles equipped with those high-pressure, narrow tires can make steering tricky. Those trolley tracks are like ruts in a dirt road.

Here at Waco on the north side of Douglas is the Missouri Pacific Railroad Depot. Across the alley to the east is a small restaurant, and a large, multi-story, brick building that stocks auto parts. Since we don't own a car, I haven't gotten too interested in that business. Back at Waco on the south side, is an irregularly-shaped building that houses the Wichita Casket Company. Across the single railroad track to the east is the Gillenwater Tea & Coffee Company. Restaurants or grocery stores, the principle customers can buy not only the products suggested by the company's name, but a complete line of supplies and fixtures as well. Sometimes when Mom and me walk past the store, the air is filled with that good smelling aroma of coffee beans that are being roasted. Makes me wish that I was old enough to drink coffee!

As we cross Water Street, the first business we are walking past is the exclusive Petrie Men's Clothing store. It is adjacent to the tall First National Bank building that goes all the way to Main Street. Back at Water on the south side of the street is Brick's Clothing store. It's becoming very popular because it sells men's work and industrial clothing and it specializes in stocking "big-men's" sizes. To the east of Brick's is the Holly Café that I've heard specializes in very good Cantonese cuisine. The Holly Café owned by two Chinese men named "Mar" is located next to the Central Building. The lower level and mezzanine of the Central Building is occupied by the Spines Clothing Store. Spine's sells high quality, top of the line merchandise for both men and women. They always have attractive window displays of clothing and accessories.

We're in luck, the traffic signal has just changed, so we can walk on across Main Street. Here on the northeast corner of the intersection is the Schweiter Building. Wouldn't surprise me a bit if the First National Bank buys it someday. Next to it, in the smaller two-story building, is the S. G. Holmes & Sons Clothing store. Holmes sell medium priced men's and boys' clothing. Its operation is somewhat unique because its sales are on a cash-only basis. Across the alley to the east and extending on to Market Street is the Biting Building. Back at Main, on the south side of the street, is the Boston Store. Within its four floors and basement, you can find almost anything you need for around the house and it also handles mostly ladies' clothing. I believe the

business is actually owned by a family named “Hinkle”. To its east is the Caldwell Murdock Building with its narrow first-floor frontage, the Heads Shoe store, the Hub Clothing store, and on to Market is the Woolf Brothers Clothing store.

Before we walk east across Market, let’s walk one block south to William. Here on the southwest corner of the intersection are the offices and printing plant of the Wichita Eagle newspaper. You may think it would be too audacious for a young lad like me to predict that its location would most likely become a public parking garage in a few years, so I won’t! The building is attractive with its ornately sculpted, limestone exterior and its almost majestic staircase that is located diagonally across the corner of the building, or so it seems. The business offices are on the second floor because the printing presses located in the basement below require high ceilings. Look at those big rolls of newsprint being unloaded off of trucks and rolled across the sidewalk ramps that extend through the basement windows, and on to the press-room floor. Phew! That ink they use to print the paper sure does stink, doesn’t it? Above the building’s entrance, during the World Series, the Eagle puts up a large, inning-by-inning score board. Above the score board is an equally large, painted layout of a ball diamond.

Big loudspeakers are hung on the outside of the building for folks to hear the live play-by-play accounts of the ball games. The crowds are invited to stand outside the building on the sidewalks and in the blocked-off streets to hear the Fall Classics. The air is filled with excitement and there’s a lot of cheering as the games progress. Very few folks own one of these new, experimental devices called a radio. Besides their being unproved as a gadget with a future, radios are expensive to either buy or build from kits. For houses like ours without electricity, the batteries are both big and expensive. To listen you can use only one set of head phones, and the installation of the required long and high antenna and ground system is another large expense that is a lot of work, as well.

We’ll walk back to the north side of Douglas and on east across Market. Here we are at the Fourth National Bank building. Its marble lobby reminds me of a tomb and most folks are so serious when they’re doing business in there. Next to it is the Adams Bennet Music company, followed by the McVicar Howard Clothiers. It sells nice men’s and boys’ clothes, but since it is a bit pricey, we buy only the clothes that I wear to church and Sunday School there. Across the

alley is the Thurston's Women's Clothing store. Wichita is very proud of Thurston's and their sponsoring of a women's team that recently won the AAU Women's National Basketball Championship. Levitts Jewelry store is sandwiched in between Thurston's and the huge S. H. Kress store. I remember the problems that the contractors had in building Kresses because of the shallow water-table here at Lawrence and Douglas. They pumped water out of the excavation for weeks before they could start pouring the foundation. Looking back to Market on the south side of the street is the McClellan Five and Dime, Woolworth's, and the Kansas Theater. I try to go to the movies there every Saturday afternoon and watch a comedy, a serial, and the silent, black and white movies (always twice) that feature cowboys like Hoot Gibson, Tom Mix, Hoppy and all the rest of my heroes that helped win the West. I am so happy now that I can read the captions across the bottom of the screen all by myself and don't have to depend on my older cousin to go along and read them to me. The tall building on the corner is the Brown Building. A lot of people hate to go to the upper floors of the building because of how fast the elevators travel. And, as they stop for the various floors your stomach really churns—guess that the operators get used to the sensation.

As we are crossing Lawrence Avenue we are approaching Sanger's Department store, one of a chain of stores that is based in Dallas, I think. It has been rumored that some outfit called Rorabaugh Buck, or something like that, is going to buy the store. Now we're in front of the Wichita Theater. Mr. Coleman, the founder of the Coleman Company is one of the "pillars of strength" in the First Baptist Church. Because of his enthusiasm and zeal for the Men's Sunday Bible Class (he posts invitations to attend it on the company bulletin boards) and the excellence of the man who teaches it, John Bunyon Smith, the class has outgrown any classroom space located within the church itself. The class meets each Sunday morning here in the Wichita Theater and the theater is usually filled to capacity (both main floor and balcony). My Dad has joined the First Baptist Church because he too is so impressed with Dr. Smith's preaching. Here at Topeka is the Southwest National Bank. Back to Lawrence Avenue on the south side of the street is the Union National Bank Building, a small soda fountain and ice cream parlor, and the Palace Theater. Have you noticed how large almost all of the theater canopies are in terms of their overhang over the sidewalks? They're great to get under when it rains and they are pretty to

see at night with all of their flashing and blinking lights. Immediately to the east of the Palace is the Jenkins Music Company store. I think that Jenkins' home office is in Kansas City, Missouri.

As we walk across Topeka on the north side of Douglas, we come to the Dockum Drug store. It also has a soda fountain as well as a pharmacy and it stocks a complete line of Rexall Drug Company products. Mom buys her Carter's little liver pills here. Life around our house couldn't go on without those tiny pink pills. Now we're passing the Novelty Theater and coming to the White Way Recreation Parlor. Men come here mostly to shoot pool and play dominoes. I've never been inside the place because it's always so filled with smoke. Don't know how they'd ever know if the place caught on fire. I do like to look at their parrots that fly around in the floor-to-ceiling, glass fronted cage. Those big glass window panes extend across most of the front of the parlor. We are now passing Henry's Clothing store and this small café, the name of which I don't remember. Back to Topeka on the south side of Douglas is the big, new, Montgomery Ward store, the State Theater, and the Sears, Roebuck store that moved into the space vacated by Wards.

We're just about to come to the end of our walk together as we cross Emporia Avenue. On the corner is the Kansas State Bank, then we come to Teten's Home-town Market, that features the Santa Fe brand of goods, distributed by the Ranney Davis food wholesaler. We're passing several pawn shops, the best known of which is the Rosen Brothers pawn shop. I don't know the names of these apartment and rooming establishments (sorta- flop-houses) that extend on to St. Francis. Back to Emporia on the south side of the street are more small stores and the majestic Eaton Hotel made famous by Cary Nation. Our neighbor, Jake Sherman, owns and operates the barber shop that is located in the Eaton hotel.

We've come to the end of our walk down my "Memory Lane." I trust that you've enjoyed it as much as I've enjoyed sharing my memories with you. Thank you for coming along.