

Heritage River Walks

#2

Three Fascinating River Walks Await You - each filled with engaging stories of the people who preceded us in time, and the places that mark our community's rich heritage.

River Walk #2

TALE OF TWO TOWNS

(average walking time 45 minutes)

Wedded Bliss... Riverside Communities Unite, Forever One

What happens to people who disagree once in a while but live more or less happily together for years? They get married.

The groom was Grand Rapids, on the East Side of the Wisconsin. The bride was Centralia, on the West Side. In 1900, a ceremony on the bridge joining the "twin" cities brought them together as Grand Rapids. In 1920, the name was changed to Wisconsin Rapids, after years of confusion with several same-named cities.

Known for many years as the "new bridge," the **Jackson Street Bridge** **A** was built in 1955 to help handle paper mill traffic. You can view the old section of the Stora Enso mill, the dam, and the great rushing waters of what is called the world's hardest working river.

Anchoring the Bridge is the **1909 Consolidated Main Office**, **B** with 1930 and 1953 additions. The building is now reserved for top Stora-Enso officials.

On the left can be seen the rear of the **1925 Mead Witter Block**. **C** Into what appears to be a conglomeration of buildings is said to be incorporated an old Witter bank.

The intersection of Third Avenue and Grand Avenue provides a view of downtown Wisconsin Rapids as it appeared in its prime. On the northwest corner, the **1912 Johnson & Hills Department Store** **D** included the city's only public elevator and a mezzanine soda fountain.

On the Southwest corner stands the columned **1921 First National Bank**, **E** its main section virtually unchanged. The ornate, high-ceilinged interior is worth viewing.

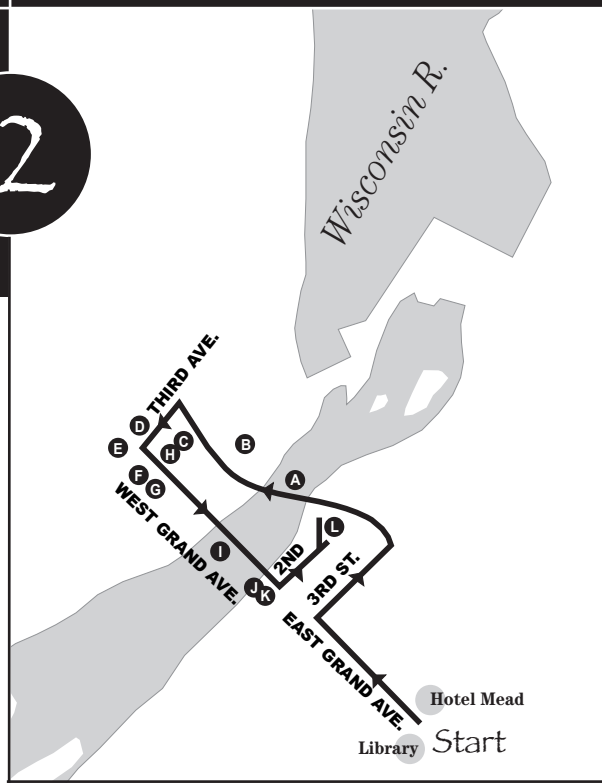
The former **Church's Drug Store**, **F** on the southeast corner, was in the 1880s, the Lyon Hotel. In 1904, Sam Church converted it to a drug store. Also in the building were a candy store, a "cash and carry" store, a tailor shop and second-floor offices. A small, third-floor "penthouse" has been removed.

Next door was the **1893 Natwick's Furniture and Undertaking**. **G** Since Natwick was postmaster, the Centralia post office was headquartered there also. It has been a grocery, bakery, paint store, pool hall music store and bookstore.

Across the street is the impressive facade of the **Mead Witter Block**, **H** home to numerous restaurants and stores. Including Woolworth's, it was built in 1925 by brothers-in-law George Mead and Isaac Witter.

The **Grand Avenue Bridge** **I** replaced several structures on the same site. At the east end, on your right, can be seen the only remaining riverbank buildings. The **1905 Post Office** **J** hosted the Elks club upstairs and Chambers Creamery in the basement. The attached **1894 Wood Block** **K** was built with township of Rudolph brick.

On the East Side, between the bridges, is the **Flatiron Building**. **L** It was once home to the First National Bank of Grand Rapids, which later combined with the still-used West Side banking facility. That union itself represented one more in a long tradition of River matrimony.



**For more information, please contact the
Wisconsin Rapids Area Convention and Visitor's Bureau at:**

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