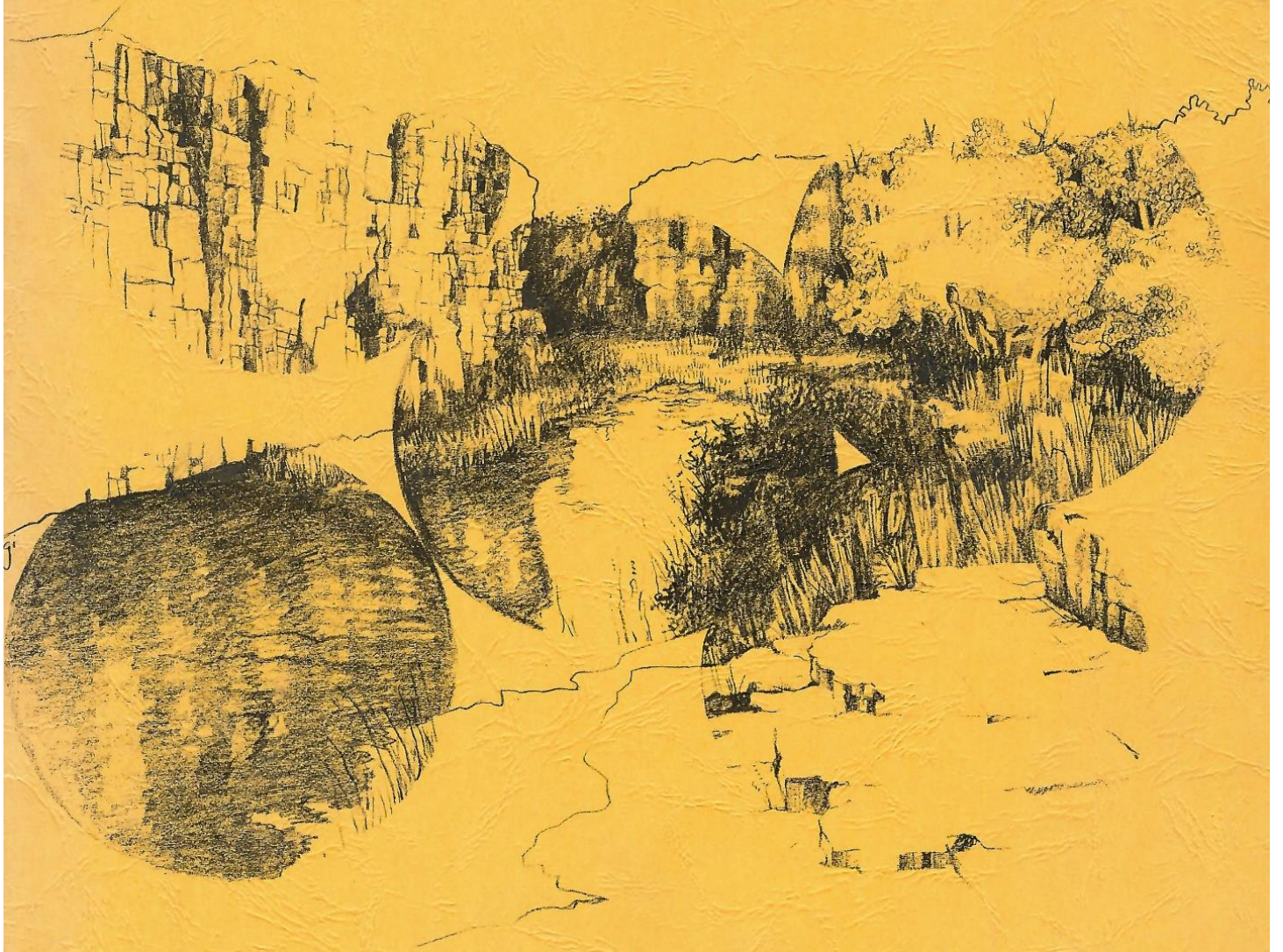


DELL RAPIDS



Our Heritage

DELL RAPIDS . . . Our Heritage

by: The Dell Rapids Historical Society

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References and/or Photographs:

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THE BEGINNING

The weary lone traveler could see a few trees to the north. To him they were a welcome sight. He had traveled many long miles by wagon that day through the rolling prairie grass and the sight of a few trees renewed his spirit. As he drew near the trees the landscape became more breathtaking and his speed increased. From his right a river crawled out of the prairie and before him the rippling water flowed past the small busy scrubs on its banks. As he gazed to his left he saw that the river continued into the distance through a rocky region of red cliffs.

It was June of 1871 and the traveler was Peter Morse. He was on an exploring trip from his home in Osage, Iowa. These surroundings were by far the best he had seen on his journey. As he breathed in his new discovery a sense of excitement came about him. He knew that before long other explorers and pioneers would be here. This rich soil would attract many settlers. They would need a mill where they could take their crops and the river would be ideal for that. He sensed that a town would someday be built here and he wanted to be a part of the growth. With these exciting thoughts in mind, Mr. Morse wasted no time in returning to his home to share this dream with his friends.

A month later he returned with a small group of friends, two of whom were Dennis and Frank Rice, experienced mill men. They, too, were impressed with the beauty of Morse's discovery. Within the next few months a few more settlers arrived.

Much work needed to be done and these pioneers wasted no time in claiming land and homesteading rights along the river. Shelters and houses needed to be built and the only wood source was a few trees scattered by the river's edge. The first shelter was small and crude. It was made of stone and the roof was covered with poles and hay. This shelter was used mainly for sleeping and all cooking was done outside. Those settlers who could afford it traveled to Le Mars, Iowa and Worthington, Minnesota and brought back lumber. Those less fortunate used what the prairie gave them and made sod huts.

By the end of the first year the hearty work of these pioneers could be seen. A settlement began to take shape on the north side of the river. A couple of small huts and two houses were nestled in the winter white surroundings. A stone dam, which would later be a part of the Rice Brothers mill, stretched across the frozen river. On Christmas day, 1871, pioneer Albion Thorne entertained the entire population of thirteen with a bountiful Christmas dinner. The small handful of settlers had earned a day of rest and merriment.



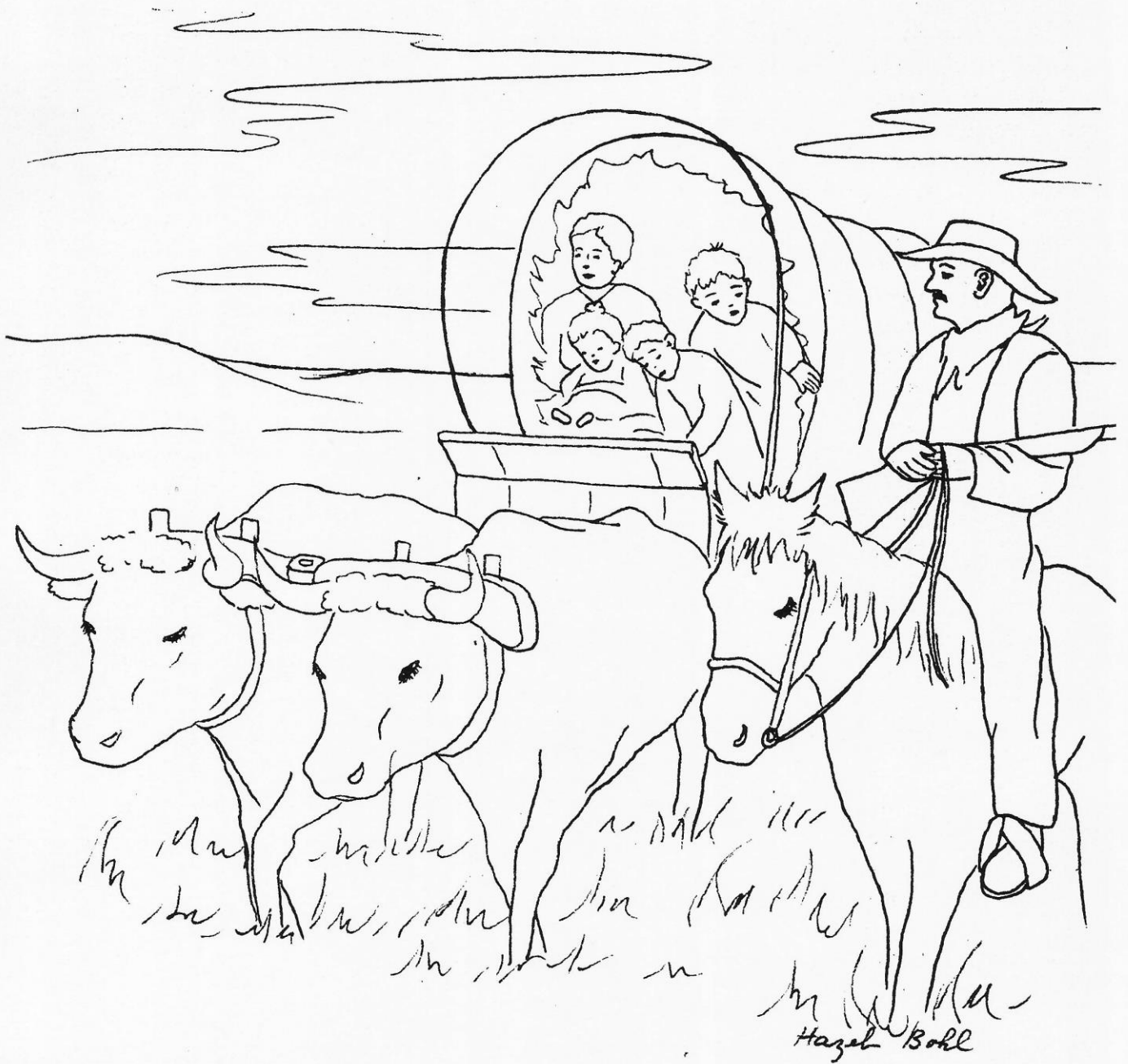
On a warm day in June, 1871 Peter Morse, a lone traveler, sighted the Dells of the Big Sioux River and envisioned a settlement there.



The first delivery of mail to the settlement gave rise to a Christmas celebration for the entire population of thirteen on December 11, 1871.



Pioneers not only tilled the sod, but used it for building homes.



Covered wagons brought pioneers to Dell Rapids in the early years.

THE GROWTH BEGINS . . .

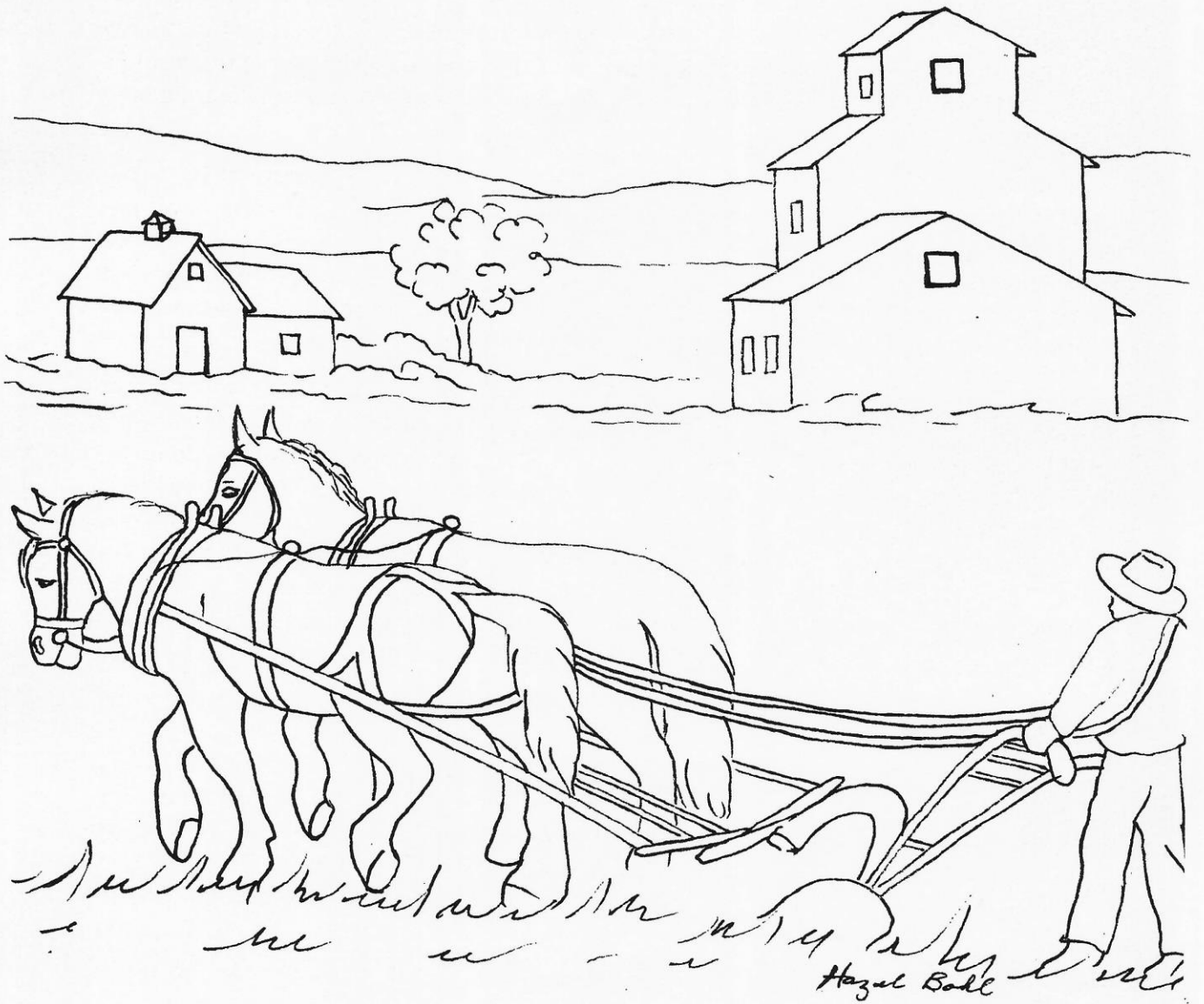
In the 1870's, settlers poured into Dakota Territory. They traveled many hundreds of miles by horse or oxen-drawn covered wagons before they reached their chosen destination. Many came to take advantage of the Homestead Act established by the U.S. Congress. This Act gave the settlers free land if they lived and farmed the land for five years or more. Additional land was given to those settlers who planted trees on the empty prairie.

Some of these pioneers were Civil War veterans, others were American born who came from the East and surrounding states and territories. Immigrants from Germany, Sweden, Norway, Scotland and England also arrived. They left their old homes, their towns, their worn-out farms because of the promise of free rich land and came to rebuild their lives in Dakota Territory. They, like Peter Morse, were adventurers who attempted to tackle this virgin land.

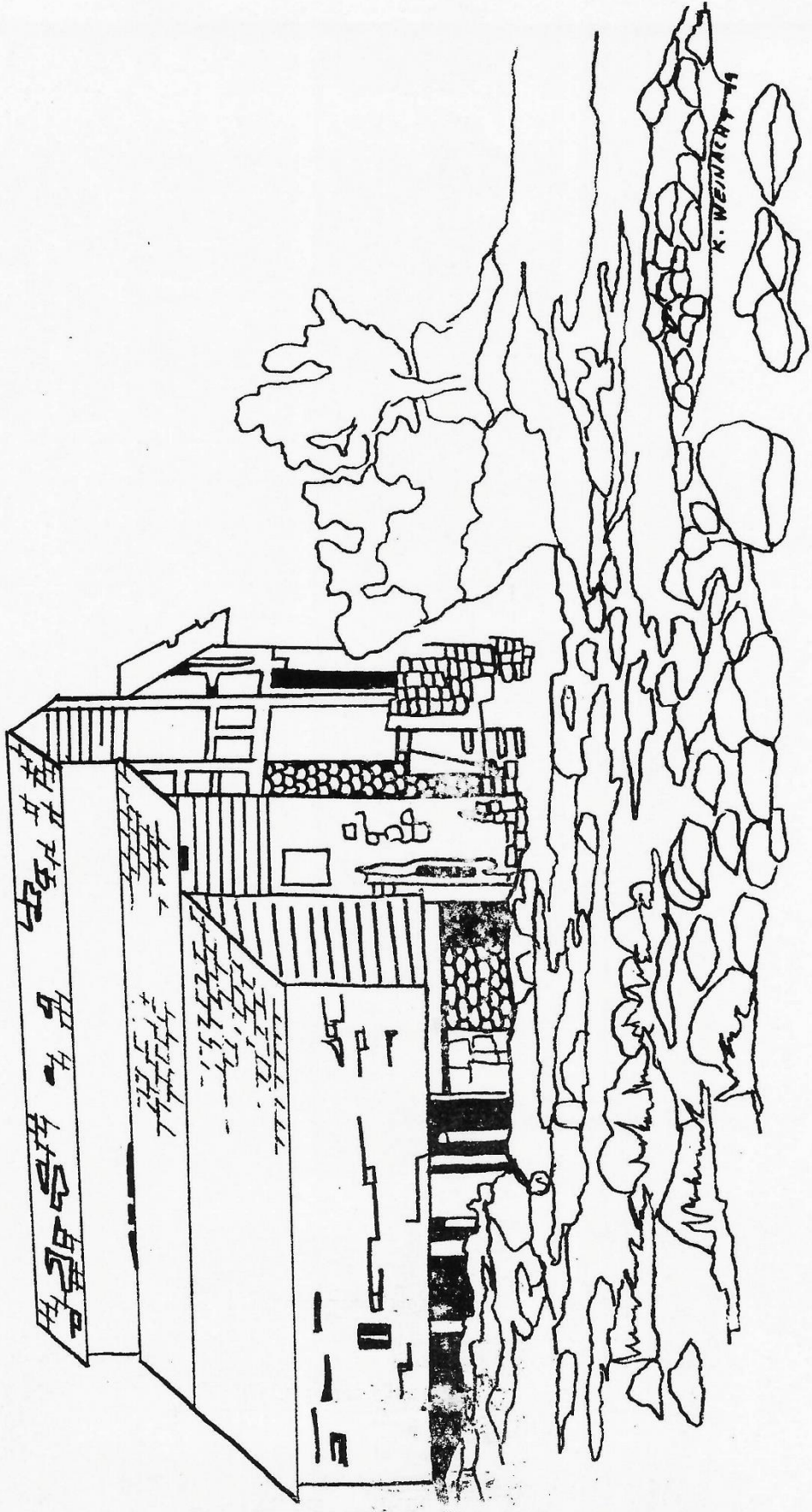
In the year 1872 the dream of Peter Morse came true, sooner than expected. The large number of eager settlers who arrived in the area caused the settlement to grow quickly. The picturesque rock formation, which they called "dells", the sheltered fertile valleys and the rolling hills along the Sioux River were very attractive to them. They gave the settlement the name of Dell City, but a year later the name was changed to Dell Rapids. The country surrounding Dell Rapids filled rapidly with people in the 1870's. To make the area more attractive some settlers brought trees and bushes such as willows and lilacs. The farmers quickly got to work plowing up the tough prairie land and planting crops. Temporary shanties were built and better houses would come later.

The city folk got to work making plans for the growth of the new town. One of the first things was to decide on a site for the business district. This was not an easy decision. Four possible sites were chosen in 1872 and finally by 1875, after three years of feuding, it was decided to combine two of these sites as the main business center. During those three years, as the rivalry existed, a few stores were built near the stone dam. It was there that the Rice Brothers built a mill in 1872. In its first year it was used as a saw mill, but because of the inadequate supply of lumber they operated it as a flour mill. For years this mill serviced the settlers for miles around by grinding wheat and corn for family use.

During that first decade Dell Rapids saw a tremendous growth in the areas of education, business, religion, government and transportation. In 1880, with less than 10 years of growth, the town's population had reached 993 people! It had a railroad, a bank, four general stores, a clothing store, two hardware stores, two harness shops, an agricultural implement business, a jewelry store, three saloons, two livery barns, two dray lines, three hotels, a boarding house, two restaurants, a shoe maker, a blacksmith, a barber, five lawyers, two physicians, two druggists, a dentist, two butchers, a photographer, several religious leaders, three lumber yards, two elevators and a mill. This boom was not yet over. Its growth continued!



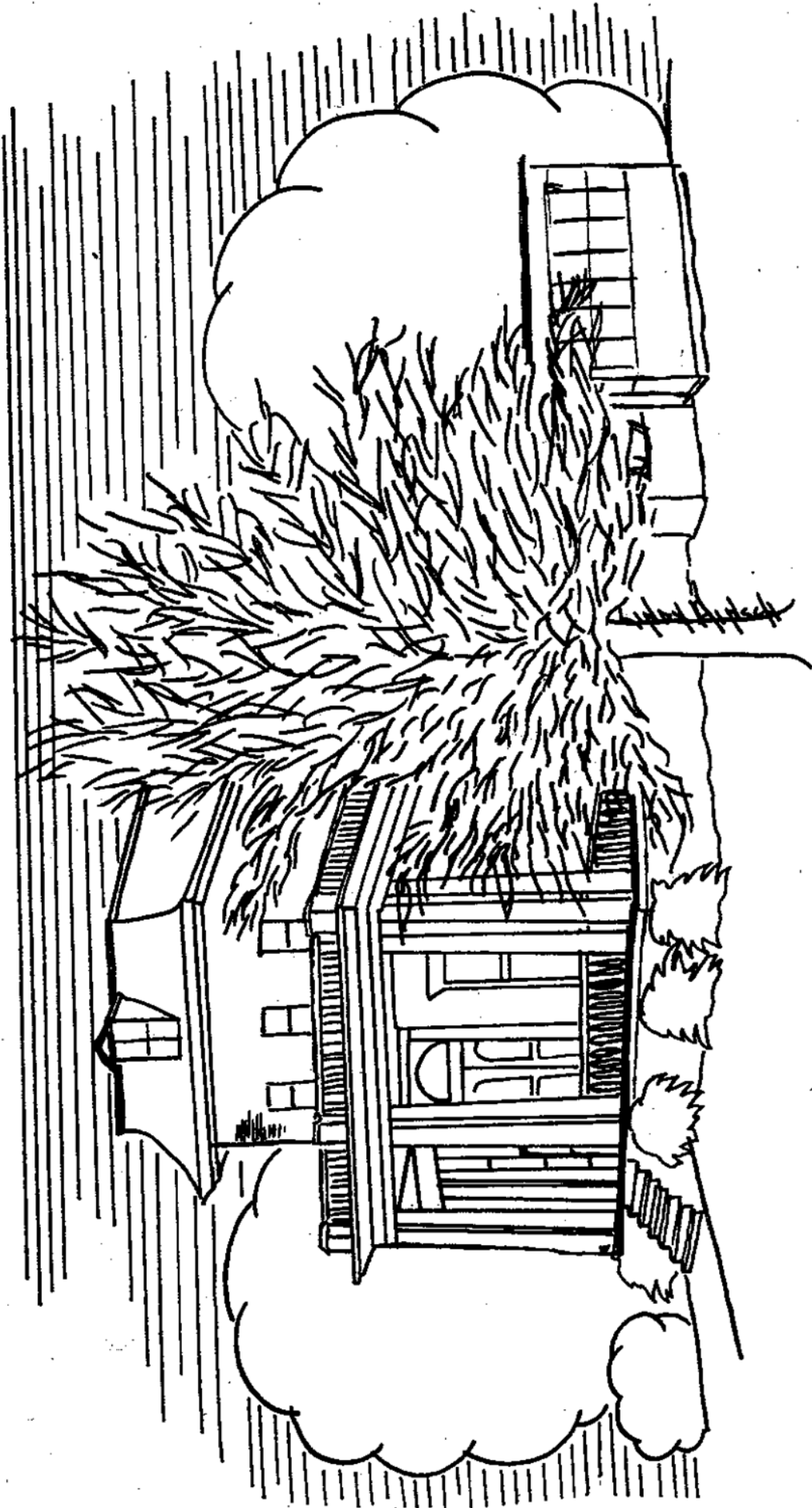
Grain elevators were essential for storing the crops at harvest time.



For years the old mill served settlers for miles around. It was not rebuilt after being destroyed by a spring flood.



This log cabin, owned by Anne Haugen, is an example of a pioneer home.



Peter Morse built this home on what is now Seventh Street in Dell Rapids.

EARLY BUSINESS AND INDUSTRY

Immigration was in full swing in the spring of 1872 when Dennis Rice set up a saw mill on the Big Sioux River. The same year Frank Rice started building a flour mill by the dam and had part of his land surveyed with the idea the business section would be developed on his land.

A contest between four landowners—Rice, Morse, Metcalf and Ervin—began, disputing where Main Street would be built.

Soon after the first settlers arrived, the stone quarry (now operated by L. G. Everist) developed rapidly, expanding to two large quarries and several smaller ones. The red quartzite stone was very desirable for building, and was used for many businesses and later, paving. At one time the quarry employed over 100 professional stone cutters.

The first store was built on B. D. Grave's land and by 1873 there were two general stores, one hardware store and one blacksmith shop near the Rice Brother's Mill.

Mr. Cowan, one of the first storeowners, committed suicide, so his brother in Jackson, Minnesota, sent Gust Uline to take charge. By 1875 the Main Street conflict was over, with the present Main Street winning the decision. Mr. Uline was offered four free lots to induce his moving the business to town. Uline built a two-story place on the corner and lived upstairs (presently Standard Oil and Huddle).

In 1874 William Van Epps arrived by horse and wagon to buy the mill from the Rice Brothers. Van Epps enlarged the mill and in 1877 built a new stone dam to replace the old one. The grain was ground between two large stone burrs which occasionally needed "dressing" and had to be turned with a derrick. Farmers brought their grist to the mill and waited until it was ground into flour and its by-products, bran and shorts. When the weather blocked early settlers' trails to the mill, they ground their wheat by hand in coffee mills at home.

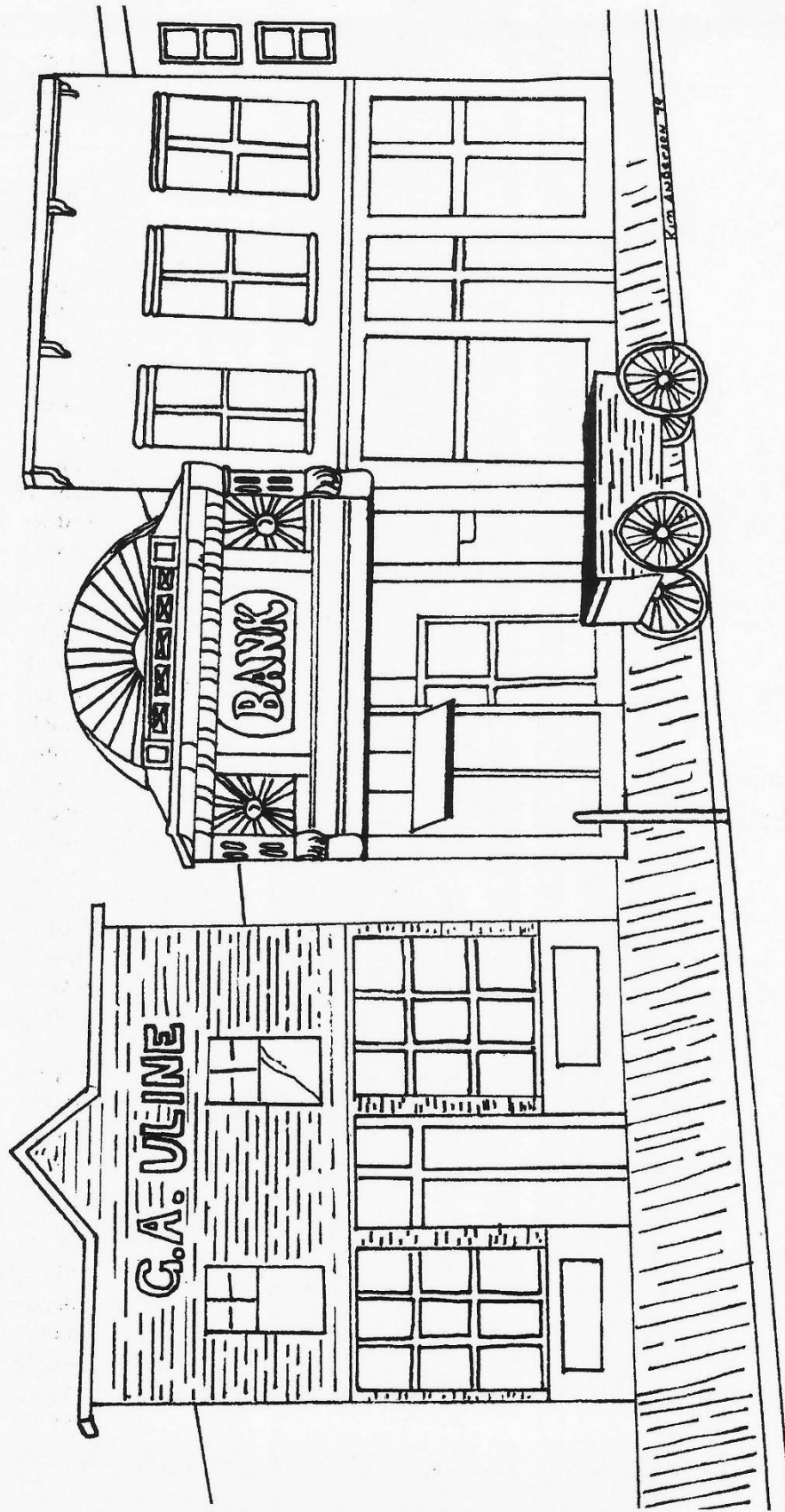
Van Epps delivered orders of flour as far away as Mitchell and Bonesteel until the mill ceased operation in 1897, when the Big Sioux River flooded and carried away a portion of the building and one stone burr. The mill was vandalized, and, much later, the remnants were torn down. A second burr has since been placed in the city park by the Daughters of the American Revolution.

The Pioneer Bank of Dell Rapids was the first bank organized in 1880 by out-of-town stockholders, and managed by G. H. Johnson. In 1892 the Dell Rapids State Bank began. G. A. Uline was president with Guy E. Bowerman cashier. It folded in 1915. O. H. Smith was president of the Granite City Bank, incorporated in 1889. The fourth bank to be established in Dell Rapids was the Home National Bank.

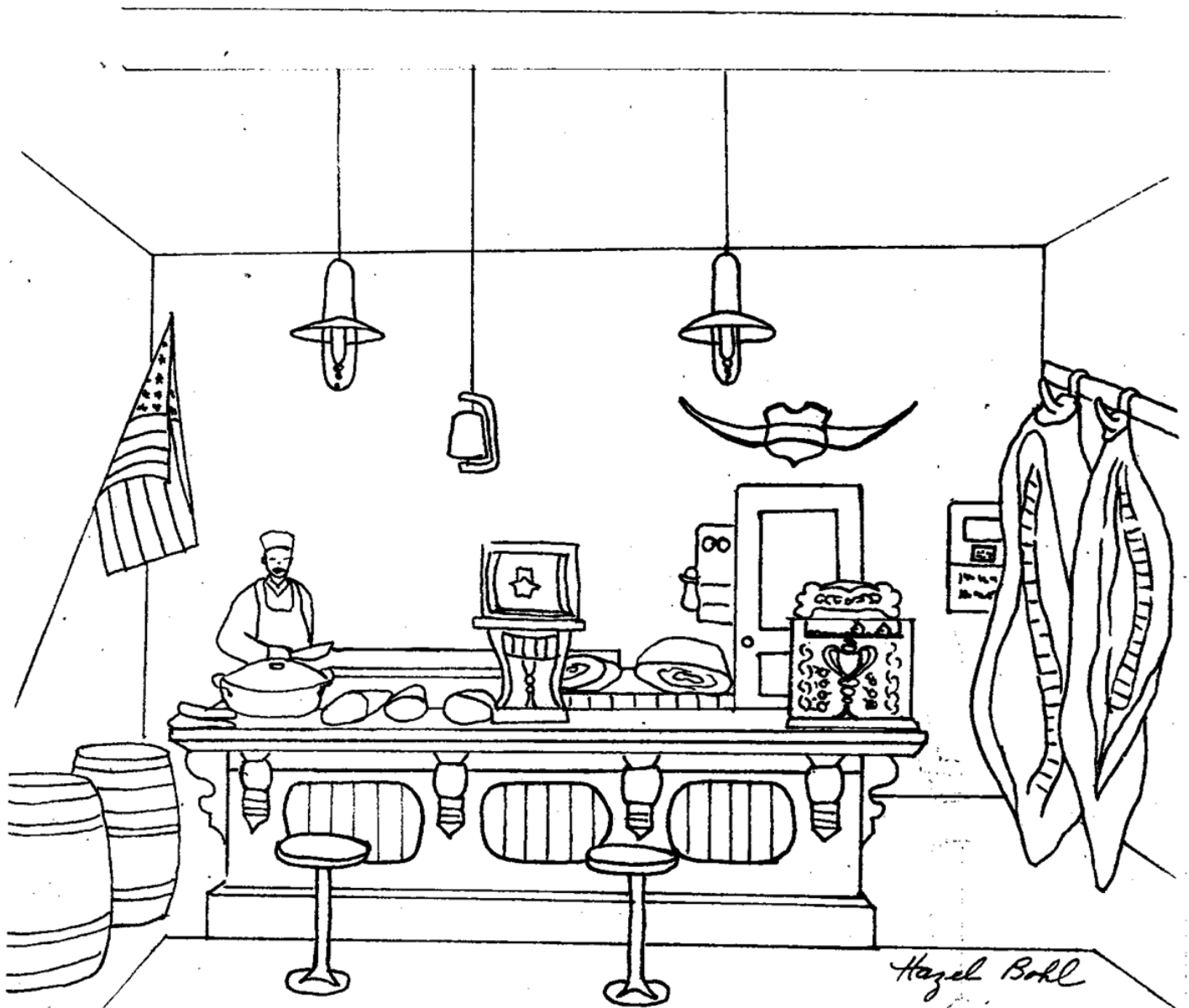
Two of the earliest business men were C. J. Johnson and J. R. Richardson, who were joined by M. A. Dieson in 1887. Dieson's Mercantile Store (site of the present Standard Oil) sold dry goods, ladies ready-to-wear, shoes and men's clothing. Dieson later built a double building and was open from daylight until 10 p.m. Shopping and socializing were both carried on in its cozy interior. Men sat around the coal stove on winter evenings under dimly lit kerosene lamps discussing the issues of the day. Clerks often spent the whole day waiting on one family, as a trip to town was an eventful expedition. 4X and Arbuckle's coffee were ground at Dieson's and labels were solicited by children for premiums of dishes, enlarged photos and even furniture.

The C & E Store was built in 1899 by O. H. Rime. This included a grocery, drygoods, women and men's wear, shoes, creamery, poultry and egg departments. The Marshall Fields line of clothing was sold.

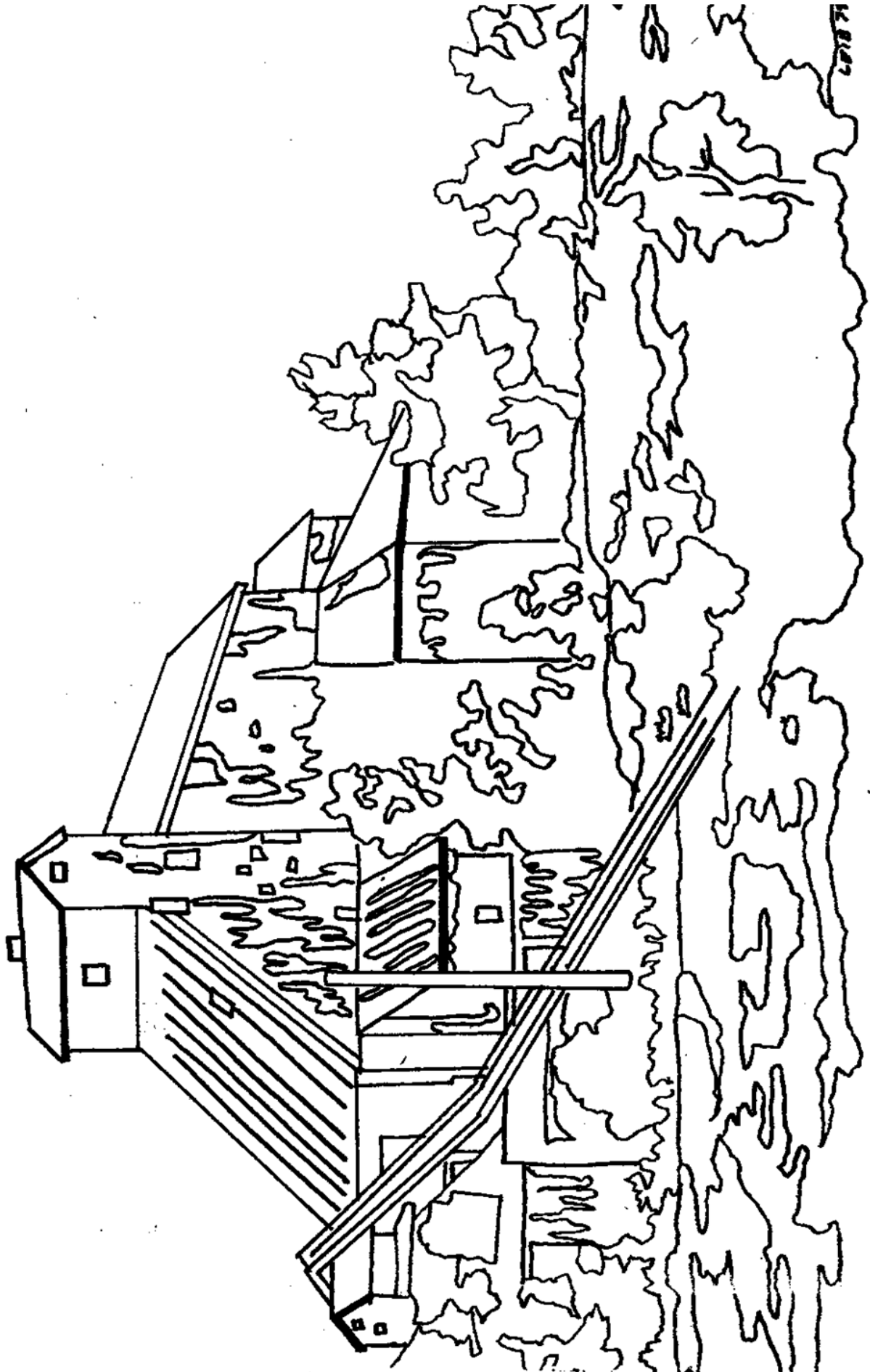
Children walked down the middle of the street, often deep with mud, to get to school. Lined with teams and wagons, Main Street offered goods and services, and provided a social center for the citizens of Dell Rapids.



The first business buildings were of wood construction.



Beto's Meat Market provided fresh meat for the growing settlement.



By 1885 quarrying of the native red rock was the main industry for Dell Rapids.



Hazel Ball

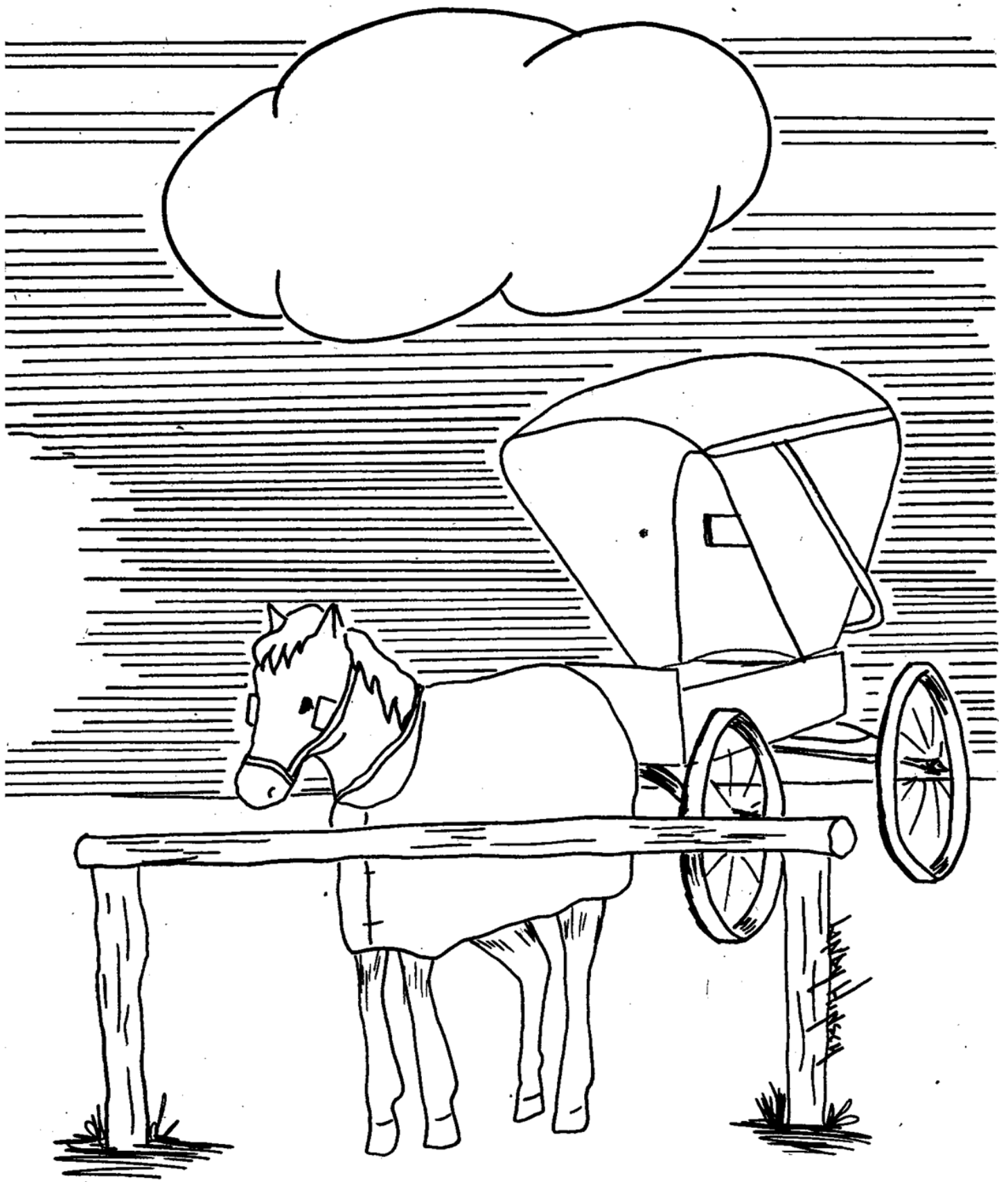
The Western House, the most popular of the hotels in Dell Rapids, burned to the ground in the early 1900's.



The Dells Hotel was built in the early 1900's.



Drug stores provided many remedies for the sick members of the community.



A fine horse and buggy meant social status in early Dell Rapids.

TRANSPORTATION . . .

Early settlers arriving in Dakota Territory chose spring as the best time to travel. This time of the year snow was off the prairie and ice was gone from the rivers. Those who dared to travel in the autumn were usually forced to dig in somewhere when snow arrived and wait for spring to continue their trip. Traveling across the prairie was tough. Since the railroads did not reach Dakota until around the 1880's wagons were the only means of transporting goods.

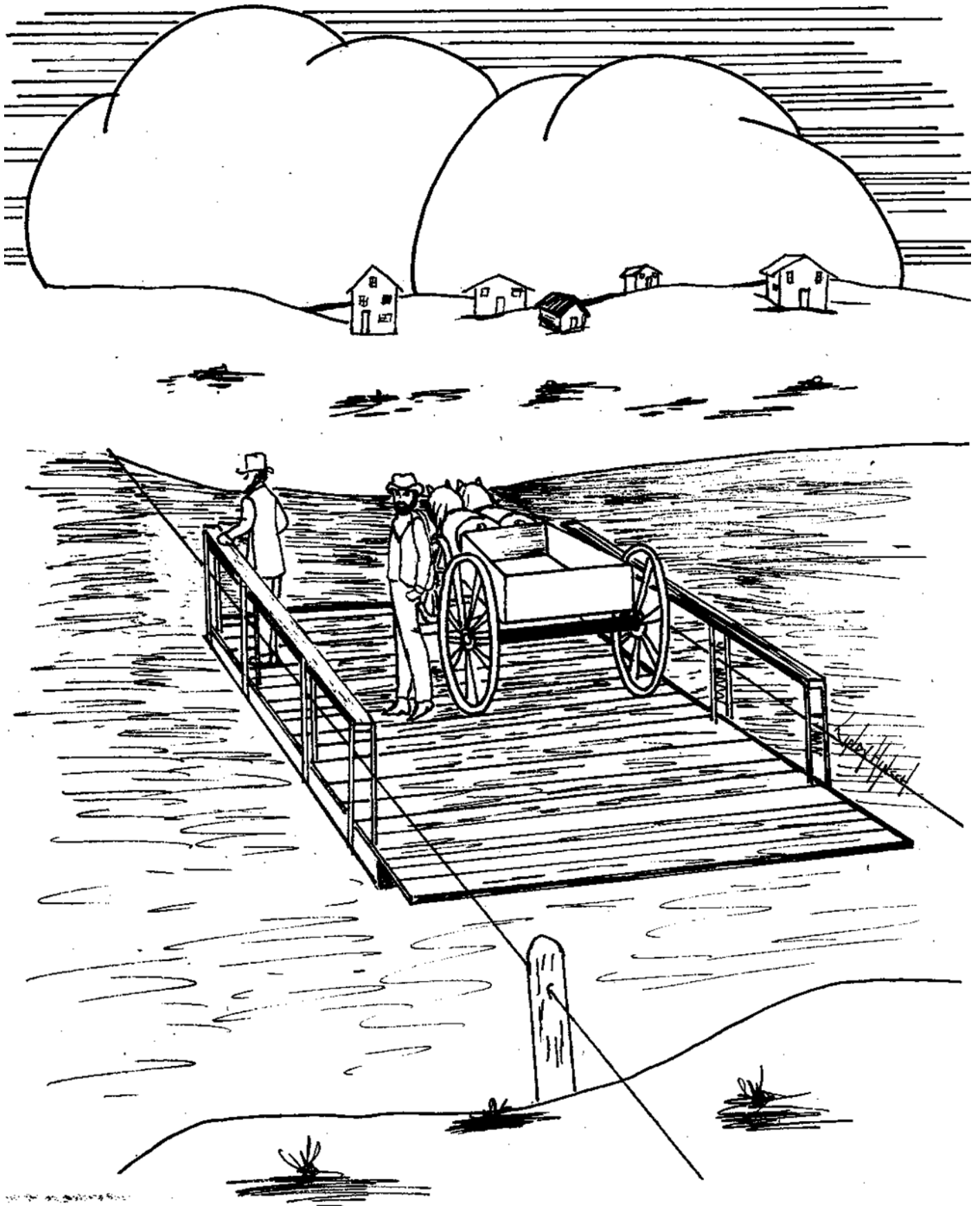
Such was the case of those pioneers arriving in Dell Rapids. Once in the area they encountered the obstacle of crossing the Sioux River to reach the settlement. The first means of crossing the river without getting one's feet wet was a small boat which was purchased for seven dollars. In the spring of 1872 it took all the money in the settlement to pay for it. It was customary for some brave soul to lead the horse and wagon across the river while the women and children rowed across in the boat. For two years this boat was the only means of crossing the Sioux River in this area.

In 1874 the growing settlement decided it was time to develop another means of crossing the Sioux. Building a bridge was expensive and that kind of money was not yet available, so it was decided to build a ferry. The community united in raising money for this project. A ferry boat was built and was used for three years until a bridge was built. This ferry cost 5 cents for each individual and 10 cents for a team and wagon. It was owned by the village and operated by a paid employee.

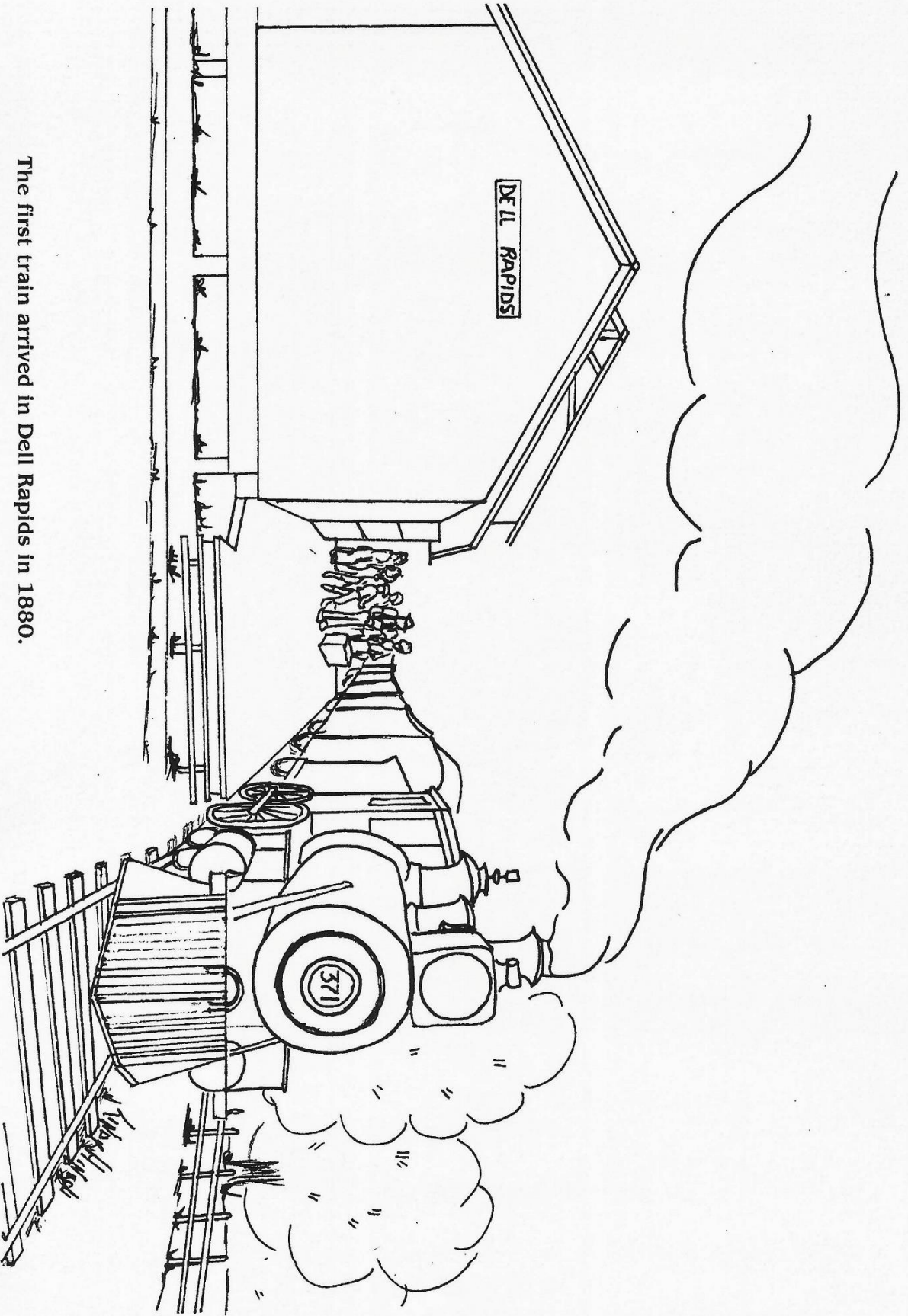
In 1877 there was a push for better roads into the area. Dell Rapids had only a few wagon roads and these became muddy and impassable during the wet seasons. That year a territorial road was built through the village, providing greatest access until the railroad came to the area.

The community was large enough and economically stable enough to build a bridge in 1877. It was a grand sight when the horses and carriages and covered wagons moved across the wooden structure. Three years later, in the spring of 1880, a flood carried the bridge away and a second bridge was constructed in 1881.

In the late 1870's the settlers realized the importance of the railroads and the pioneers went to great lengths to secure this service. Railroads were making plans to push into Dakota Territory and the community leaders felt that the lack of a railroad would retard the growth and business of Dell Rapids. In the fall of 1880 the first train reached the settlement and it was a day of celebration when the train pulled into the depot. There was a parade, speeches, and the sounds of excitement as the church bells rang! For years afterwards the railroad depot was an important and interesting center. The railroad had a definite impact on the community. It brought better communication and social and economic stability which were to continue for years to come!



The ferry, was the only means of crossing the river for the first settlers.



The first train arrived in Dell Rapids in 1880.

SOCIAL AND RECREATIONAL EVENTS

The first social event in Dell Rapids (then known as Dell City) took place on December 11, 1871. The cause for celebration by the settlement's thirteen inhabitants was the first delivery of mail to the community. Because of the time this great event occurred, the celebration became a Christmas festivity at the home of Albion Thorne, the first postmaster. From that time on social activities played an important role in the lives of the citizens of the community.

Social activities were not always planned. After the arrival of the railroad in 1880, the depot became the place to meet and talk, to watch the trains come in and wait for outside communication.

From the very beginning of Dell Rapids' history, July 4th was an occasion for social gatherings. The holiday was vigorously celebrated with parades, band music, speeches, picnics, plays and dancing.

In 1888 an important contribution was made to the social scene of Dell Rapids. It came in the form of the Grand Opera House built by M. R. Kenefick and John A. Cooley. The opening of the Grand Opera House was indeed a great social event on November 5, 1888. The play "Lynwood" was presented by a touring theatre company.

The Grand Opera House became a center for a variety of social events aside from professional drama. It was used temporarily as a roller rink in the late 19th century. The use of movable wooden chairs for theatre viewing made it possible to clear the floor for skating, as well as dancing, which was extremely popular. Musical varieties, medicine shows, minstrels, hypnotic and magic acts, concert music and dramatic readings were included in the offerings.

Amateur drama also played a large role in the presentations of the Grand Opera House from the very beginning.

The Opera House was also used for church socials and suppers, which helped to raise money as well as provide social activity. Lectures at the Grand were well attended and usually created excitement. Political meetings and rallies were held there also, often accompanied by a torch-light parade.

By 1900 the Opera House had lost its novelty and luster for the time, with more amusements being offered in the community. There were train excursions, a new dance hall, race track, pool halls, a bowling alley and lecture courses.

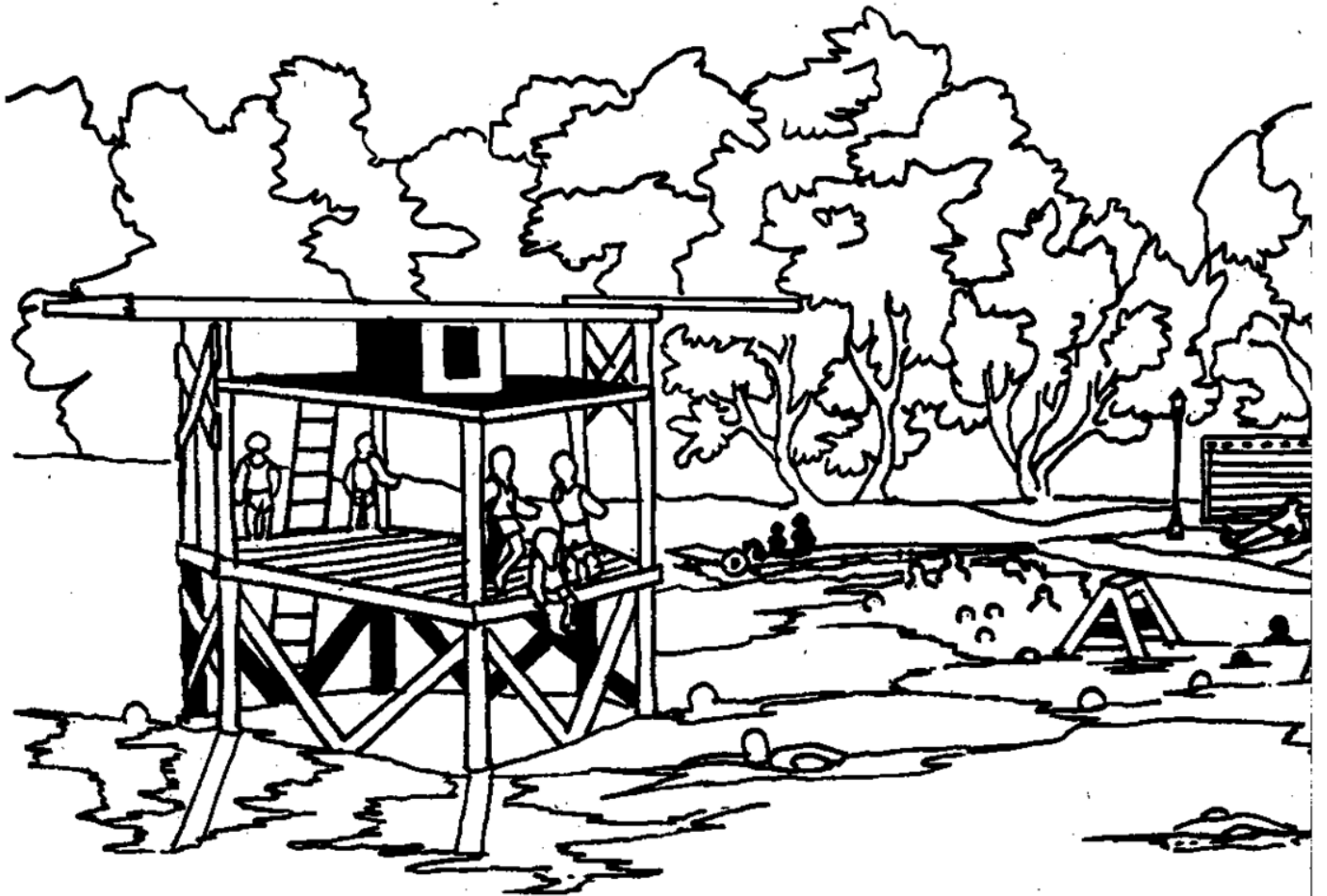
In 1912 the Lear Brothers brought moving pictures to the Grand Opera House, and a new form of social gathering took place. Movies were shown there until the 1930's when a new movie house was built.

While the Opera House was an important part of the social life of Dell Rapids, many outdoor activities were available for the amusement of the residents. Winter found skaters on the Big Sioux River, and sleigh rides were popular with young people. Sledgers found excitement on Beto's Hill, which was iced to propel them down the hill, around the corner and south across the railroad tracks.

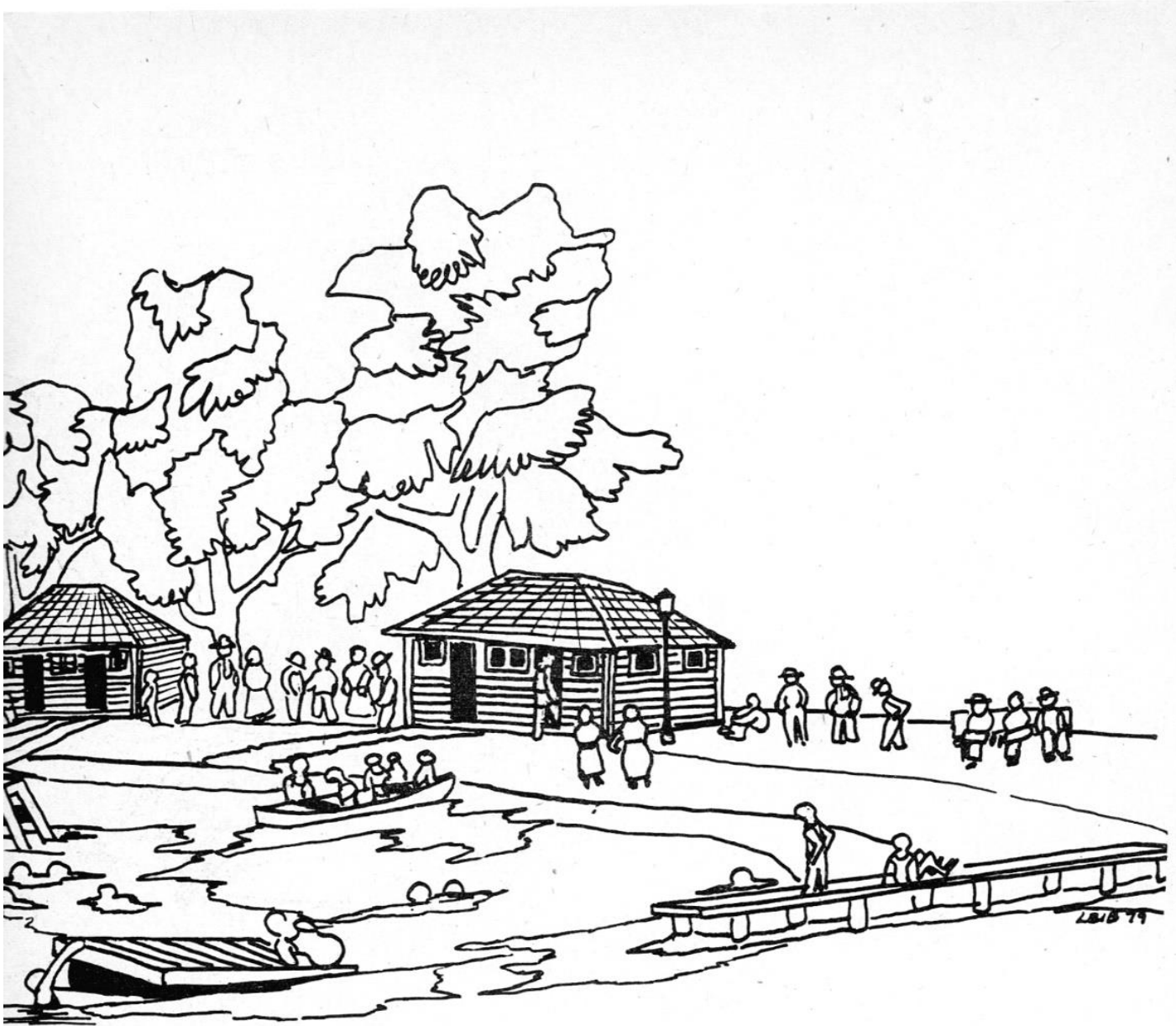
During the summer months a bathing beach on the Big Sioux River brought people from all over the area for picnics and outings.

Quilting bees were also vital in bringing women together to socialize and to perform a useful function. Husking bees provided a social affair that had a practical purpose, as well. Dell Rapids was the site of a National Corn Husking Bee in the 1930's.

Social activities continue to be an integral part of the Dell Rapids community, as witnessed by the many organizations that are serving the town today.



A bathing beach on the Big Sioux River bro



nt people from all over the area for outings.

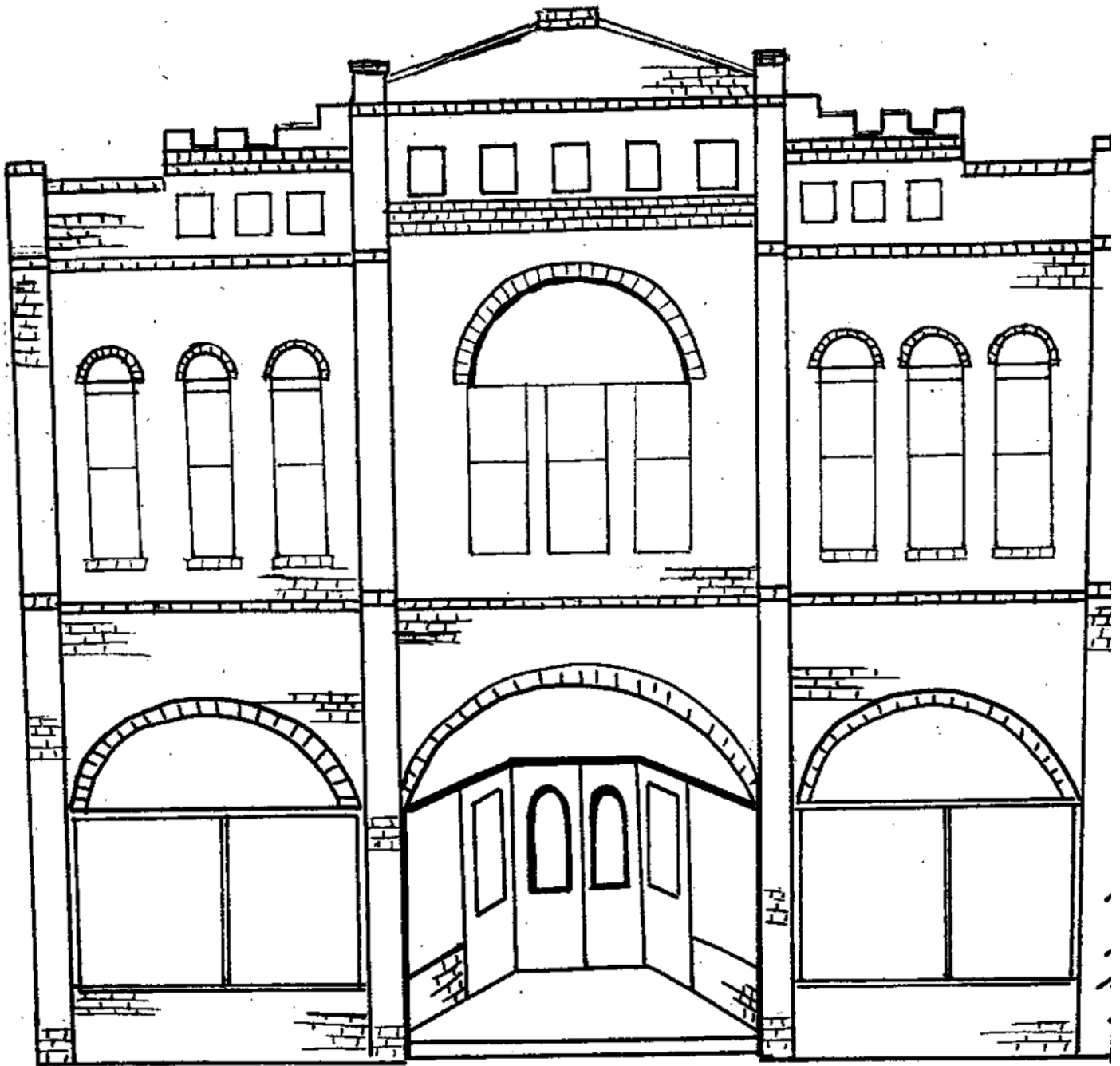


Hazel Bohl

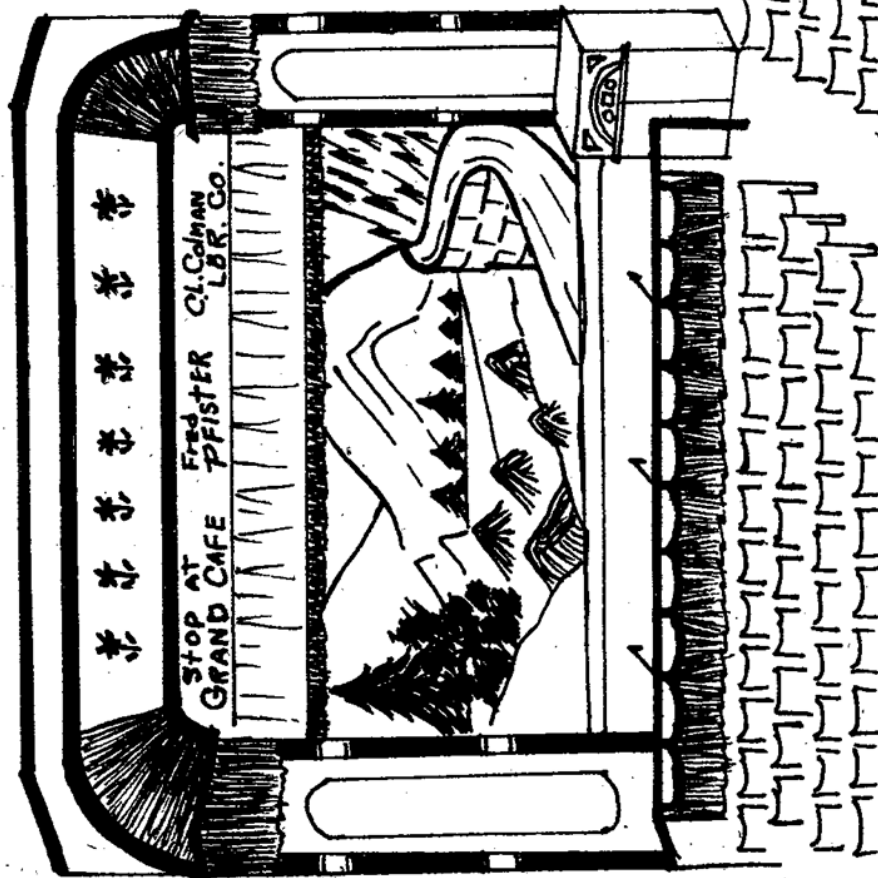
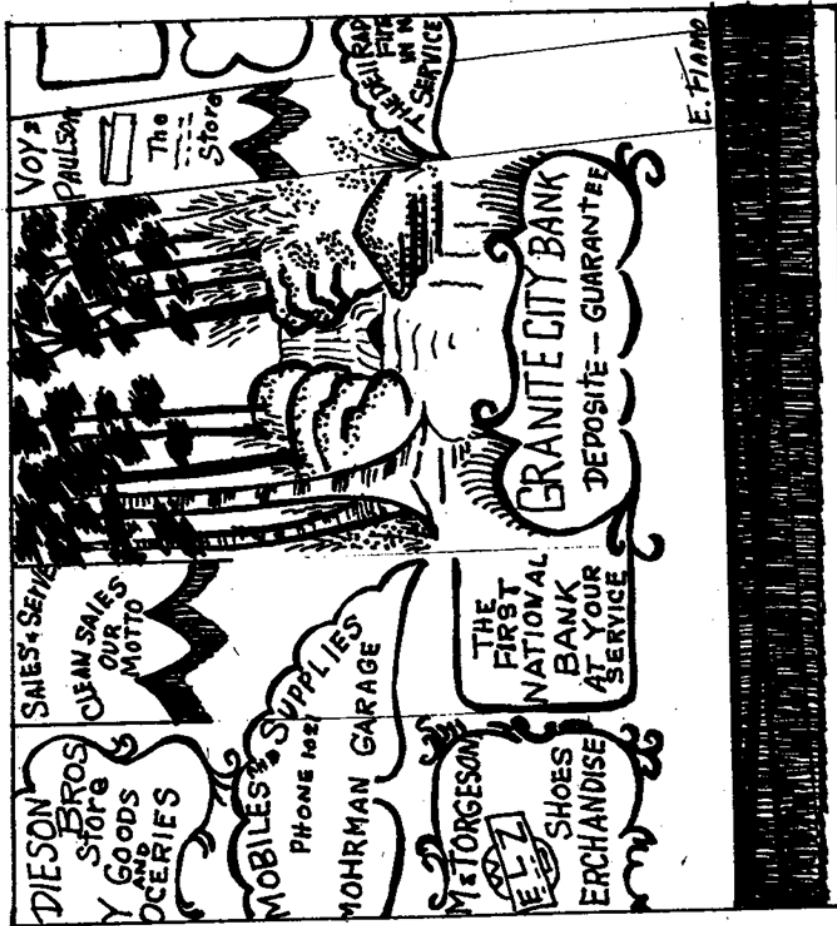
Sledders found excitement on Beto's Hill, which was iced to propel them down the hill, around the corner and across the railroad tracks.



Skaters would bring their own shovels and clear the snow from the frozen Big Sioux River before skating in the moonlight.



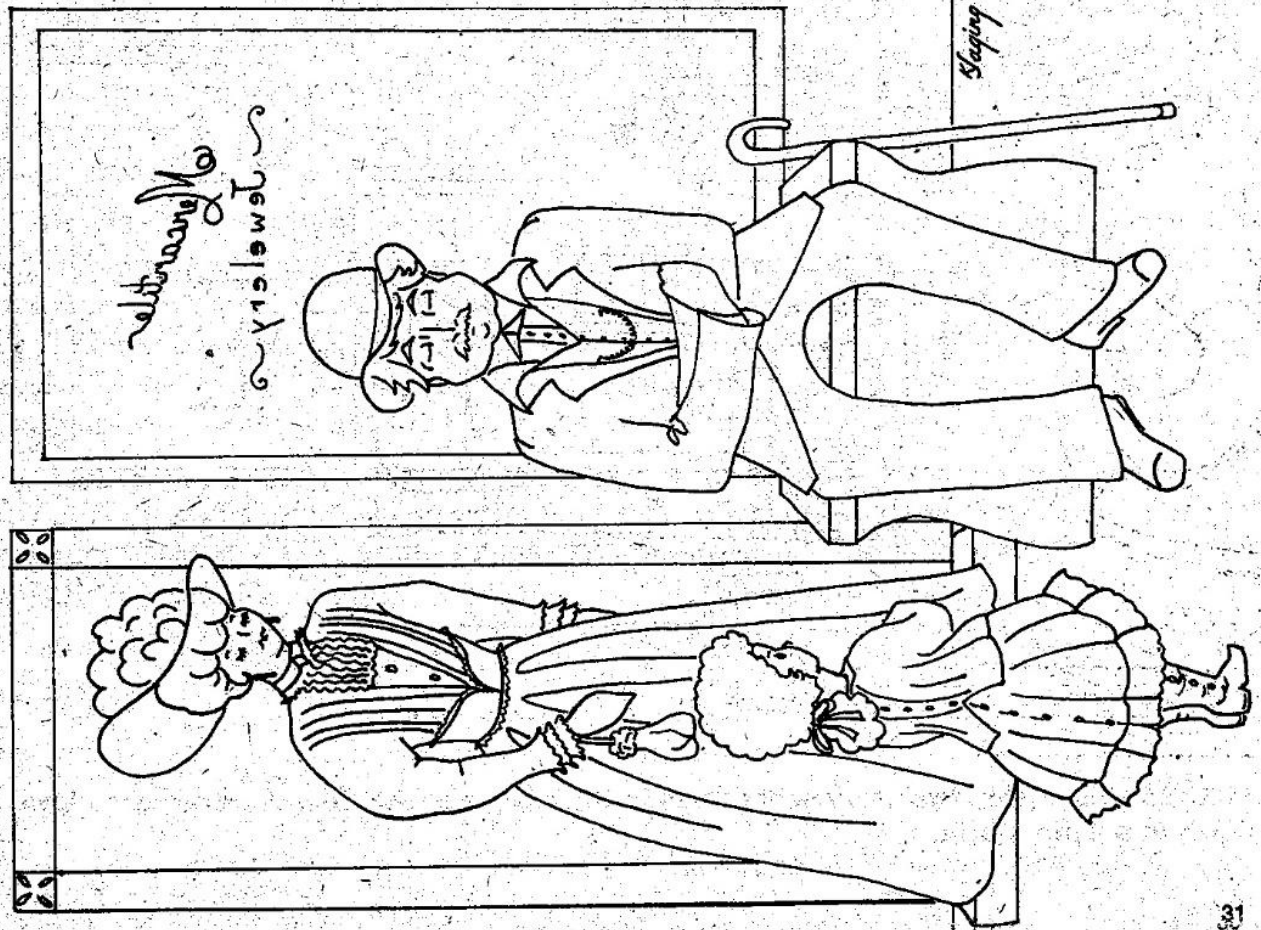
The Grand Opera House was constructed of pink quartzite. A professional theatre company presented the play, "Lynwood", to a large audience at the grand opening on November 5, 1888.



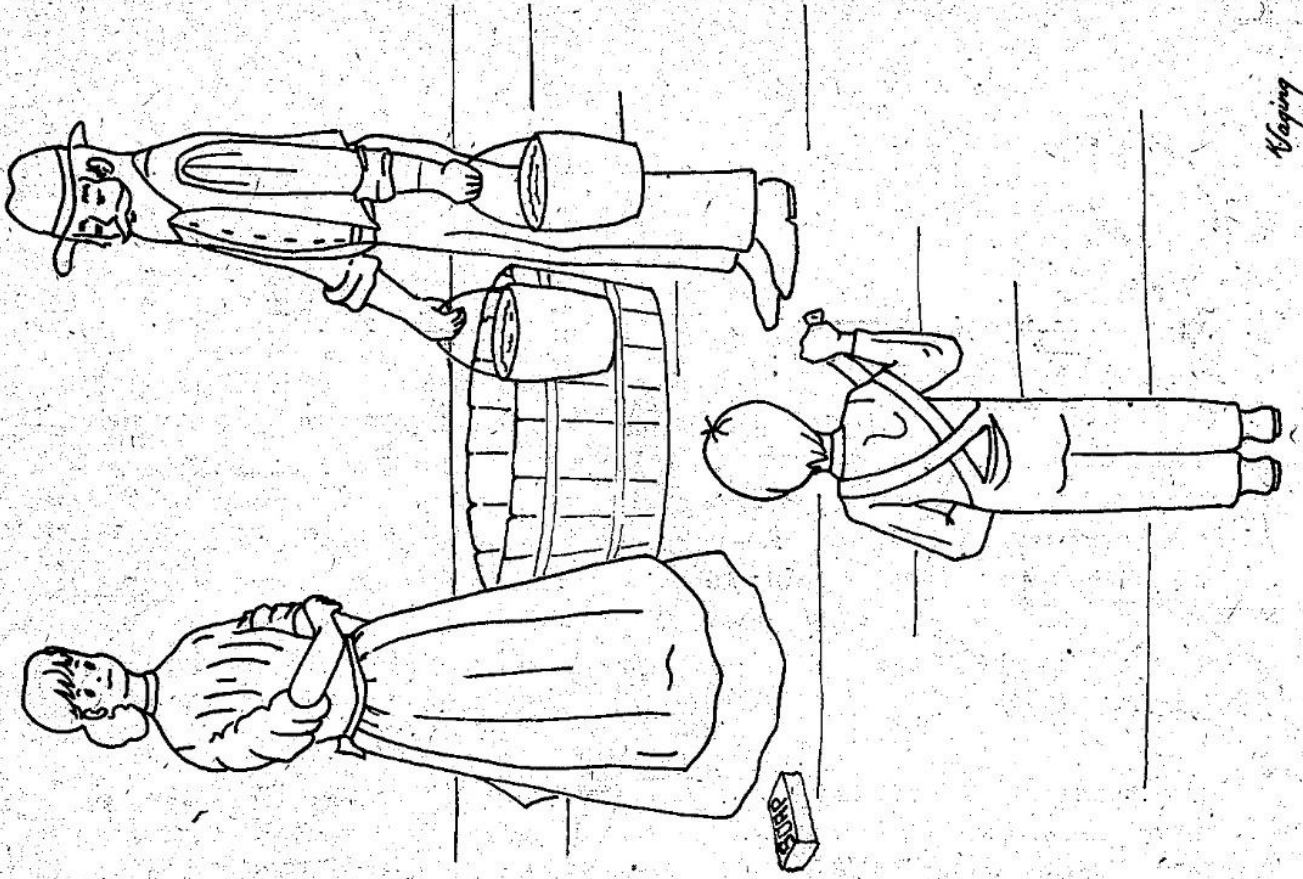
These 1888 olio curtains, which advertised local businesses, were among the focal points at the Grand Opera House.



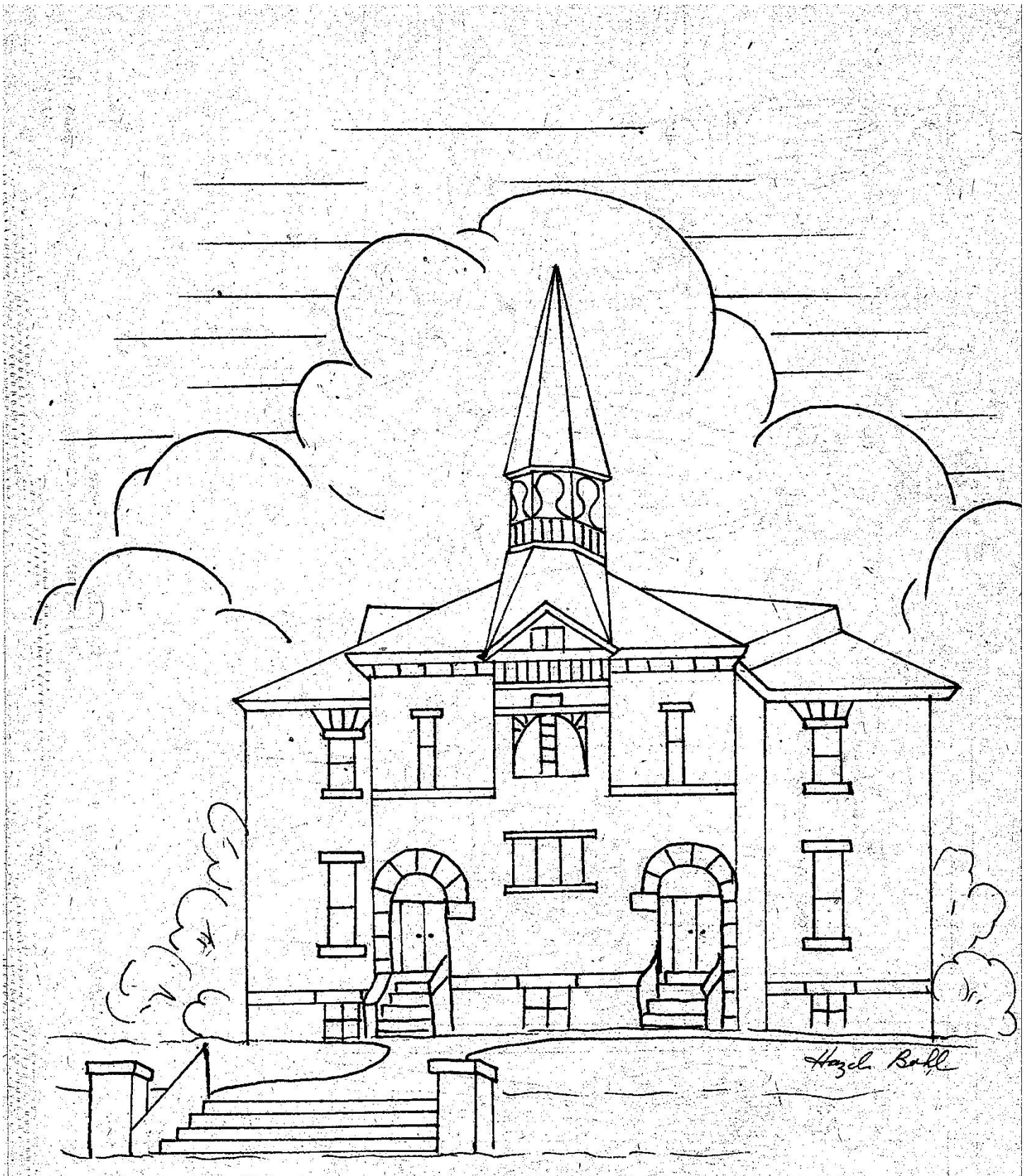
Quilting bees were an opportunity for pioneer women to socialize.



Waiting for the shopper.



Weekly baths were taken in that most necessary piece of equipment—the wash tub.



In 1885 this sturdy two story school was built to replace the wooden structure blown down in a wind storm.

EDUCATION . . .

Even as the first pioneers entered Dakota Territory there was a public cry for an educational system. Through the dedicated efforts of these settlers many of the towns had some type of program within the first few years of existence. School houses in those days were unglamorous and were, in many cases, uncomfortable and inconvenient. Some were log cabins with dirt floors, with a few long boards serving as benches and a box for a desk. Many were sod houses, some functioned in the homes of settlers. One common problem facing the teacher was that of immigrant children who could not speak English and in many schools only the teacher could speak English. The required curriculum included English grammar, geography, arithmetic, reading, writing and spelling.

In 1873 in Dell Rapids a small group of citizens held their first school meeting. They unanimously agreed to set up an educational program and classes began in a home. Rent was six dollars (\$6.00) per month and that first session was held for three months. In 1874 the school term was increased to five months and the enrollment reached thirty. In 1876 the growing enrollment (fifty-three students) created a need for a better facility. A one-story wooden structure was built, but within four years this proved to be inadequate. With the school term being extended to nine months in 1878 and because of continued growth of the settlement, it was decided in 1880 to add an upper floor to provide more room.

In 1884 disaster struck when a windstorm destroyed the school and the community was faced with building a new school. In 1885 classes were held in the Episcopal Hall and Baptist Church while a sturdy, two-story stone building was erected. It had six departments and served the community for several decades. High school classes were added in the late 1880's and the first five graduates received their diplomas in 1890. The public school system was well on its way in serving the needs of the community.

At the turn of the century another sector of the community was making headway in the educational field. In 1910, thirty-seven years after the public school was started, the number of Catholic families in the community was sufficient to start a parochial school, St. Mary's Academy.

Both the public and parochial schools reflected the continuing growth of the community.



By 1910 the number of Catholic families in the community was sufficient to open St. Mary Academy.



The building of the Andrew Carnegie Library in 1909 greatly enhanced educational opportunities for the community.

GOVERNMENT . . .

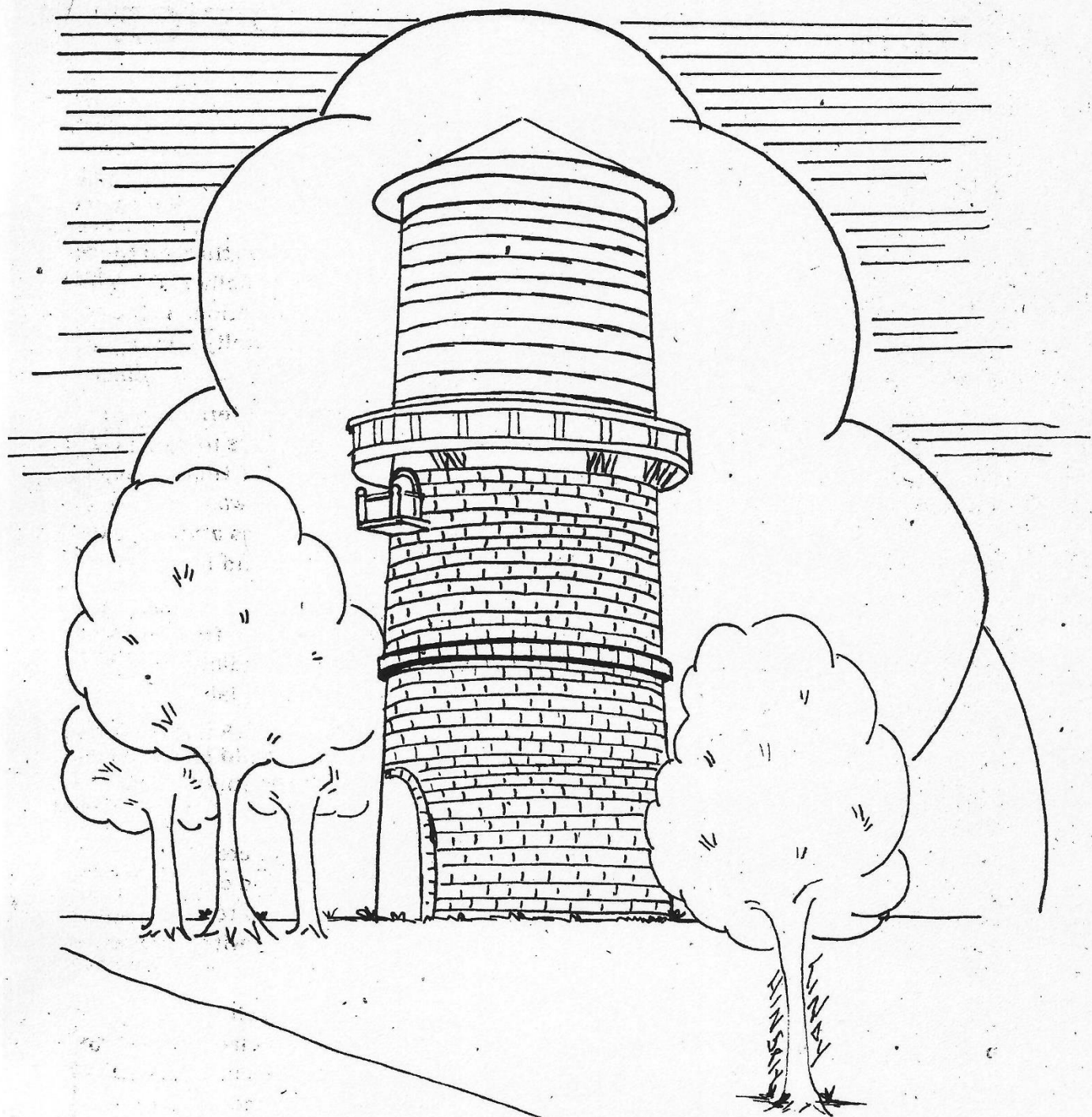
From 1872 to 1879 the basic foundation of Dell Rapids took shape through the efforts of various businessmen and strong civic leaders. These men usually had insight and the ability necessary to solve the concerns facing the small population. As the settlement grew more people began to take an active interest in community affairs. This growth demanded leadership in government concerns.

In 1879 a group of citizens decided it was time for a structured form of government. The population was at least 600 and growing. Their first step was to incorporate the settlement of Dell Rapids under a provision of a special act of the Legislative Assembly. It was no longer a settlement but an official "village" and was called so for ten years. A Board of Trustees was elected to conduct all the business affairs that affected the village. The board included a president, treasurer, clerk and four trustees, each with appointed duties.

There were many business transactions facing the first Board of Trustees when they met March 24, 1879. They wasted no time securing funds for building a bridge for the new territorial road, purchasing cemetery ground and providing a jail. A fire break was developed to protect the village from prairie fires. Bonds for twelve thousand five hundred dollars (\$12,500) were issued to induce the railroad to build into town. To maintain law and order a marshal was hired. Later there were appointments for a fire warden, fire chief, street commissioner and a Board of Health.

Other governmental decisions of the village of Dell Rapids were made in the 1880's. A volunteer fire department was organized in 1883 and a hand engine was purchased. Muddy streets and the need for sidewalks were matters also requiring attention. By 1888 Dell Rapids had a system which supplied the village with pure spring water.

In December, 1888 a petition was circulated to determine if Dell Rapids should become a city under general law. In January, 1889, after a special election, the community lost its Board of Trustees and village status and Dell Rapids emerged as a city with a city council. As the city was making plans for its future another larger government was going through changes. Dakota Territory officially became South Dakota and North Dakota November 4, 1889.



The Dell Rapids water tower, built in 1894, is one of only three such stone structures in the country.

such stone structure

built in 1894 is one of only three such structures in

NEWSPAPERS AND POST OFFICE

The press we know today owes much to her early founders, which aided the settlement of the country and performed great services. Once the government opened the region for settlement, newspapers were founded mainly for the purpose of printing "proving notices". Most papers were of a general nature, existing for news, with some devoting space to social life.

Late fall, 1871, brought J. D. Ervin from Webster City, Iowa, to Dell Rapids. In 1872 he established the Dell City Journal, which was one of the newspapers distributed for the program of publicity undertaken by the Immigration Department of the Territory. Ervin remained in Dell Rapids only a short time at first. Arranging to have Albion Thorne send him local items, he returned to Webster City and started publication of the Dell City Journal from there. Copies were sent to Dell Rapids for publication.

Later settling in Dell Rapids, Ervin lived in a small frame one-room house. The press stood out-of-doors. A traveling preacher named C. S. Codington used the Dell City Journal around 1873 for his social, moral and religious writings. This enabled him to reach people he couldn't contact personally through his preaching.

Ervin published the newspaper until 1873, but a new publisher did not pick it up until 1879. The Dell Rapids Exponent was then started by E. C. Whalen and continued for nine years. Albion Thorne exchanged his farm for the Exponent, but his venture was short-lived, and he soon sold out to Charles E. Griswold.

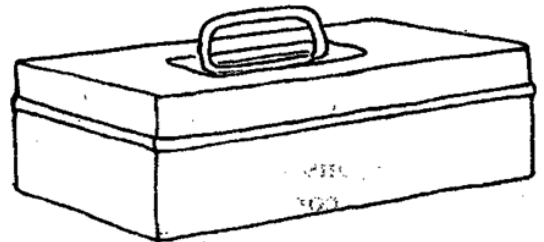
In 1885 W. C. Nesbit and W. H. Davis began publishing the Times, which they sold to the Ward Brothers in 1892. The Dell Rapids Tribune that we know today was first published by Nesbit in 1892 and sold to W. W. Sanders in 1919.

Character of a new country and its people was often judged by its newspapers. The newspaper's character was determined by its founder, interesting editors, nameplate and masthead and the machinery used to publish it. The early journalist was constantly seeking a new place, the new adventure. He was a roving man, whose ingenuity was tested during the Great Blizzard of 1881.

Many papers folded, for snow blockaded shipments of paper. Some, however, met the situation by reducing the size of their sheets to conserve their meager supplies. Some printed on the figured and back sides of wallpaper and a manila paper. The legal notices had to be printed and the press still rolled. The Dell Rapids Exponent was one of the newspapers to survive the Great Blizzard.

New Year's Day, 1872, found a post office established and Dell City renamed Dell Rapids. Albion Thorne was appointed postmaster at the salary of \$1 per month, and Lewis Heulett carried the first mail on a route from Sioux Falls. To deliver the mail in snowy weather, Heulett used an Indian cutter made of ash and cottonwood boards. When the snow melted he walked or rode. Thorne said, "Heulett carried the mail afoot, on horseback or in one of the most primitive 'pangs' you ever saw."

On January 1, 1872 the Postal Service recognized the settlement of Dell Rapids. This box was the first official Post Office.



Postmaster Thorne kept valuable letters and documents in the small tin post office box during his 18 months service. When he moved, the post office moved with him.

The first Dell Rapids Post Office is now in the Public Library, placed there by Mabel Thorne several years ago. Pioneer history.



Peddler wagons were a frequent sight in the area and one could purchase anything from a louse comb to a wash tub. The peddlers were also a welcome source of news.



The Dell Rapids Exponent was the first newspaper to serve the community.

RELIGION . . .

As the settlers arrived and Dell Rapids grew so did the different religious denominations. At first, while the settlement's population was small, these denominational differences were put aside and all worshipped together. In early 1872 the Union Sunday School was organized. Its purpose was to provide religious services for settlers of all faiths. Gradually, as more settlers of the same faith arrived, various churches began to organize and within ten years there four denominations represented.

In July of 1872 seventeen people met to organize a Baptist church. In the same year the Presbyterians met and made plans for a church. For the next few years these two churches were the only religious organizations for miles around.

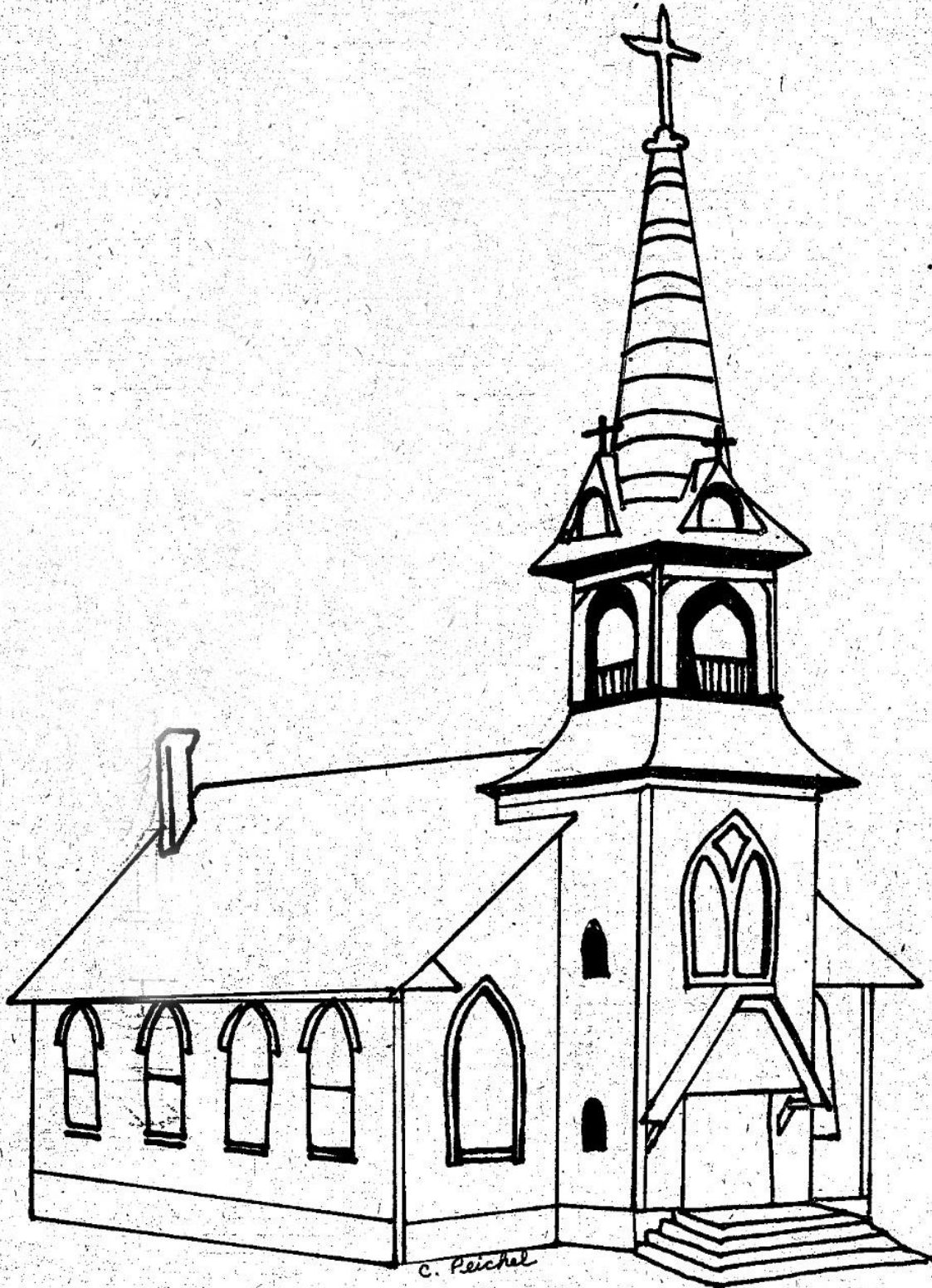
In the late 1870's and early 1880's other church groups were organized. These included the Lutherans, Episcopalians, Catholics, Methodists, Congregationalists and Reform.

Once these groups met and became organized they needed a place of worship until their churches could be built. Services were often held in homes while some groups met in the school, community warehouses or even in business places. Although first churches were built of lumber, as the congregations grew and more room became necessary, some parishes used the stone from the quarry for building. Each was built with a unique architectural design and provided beauty in the growing town.

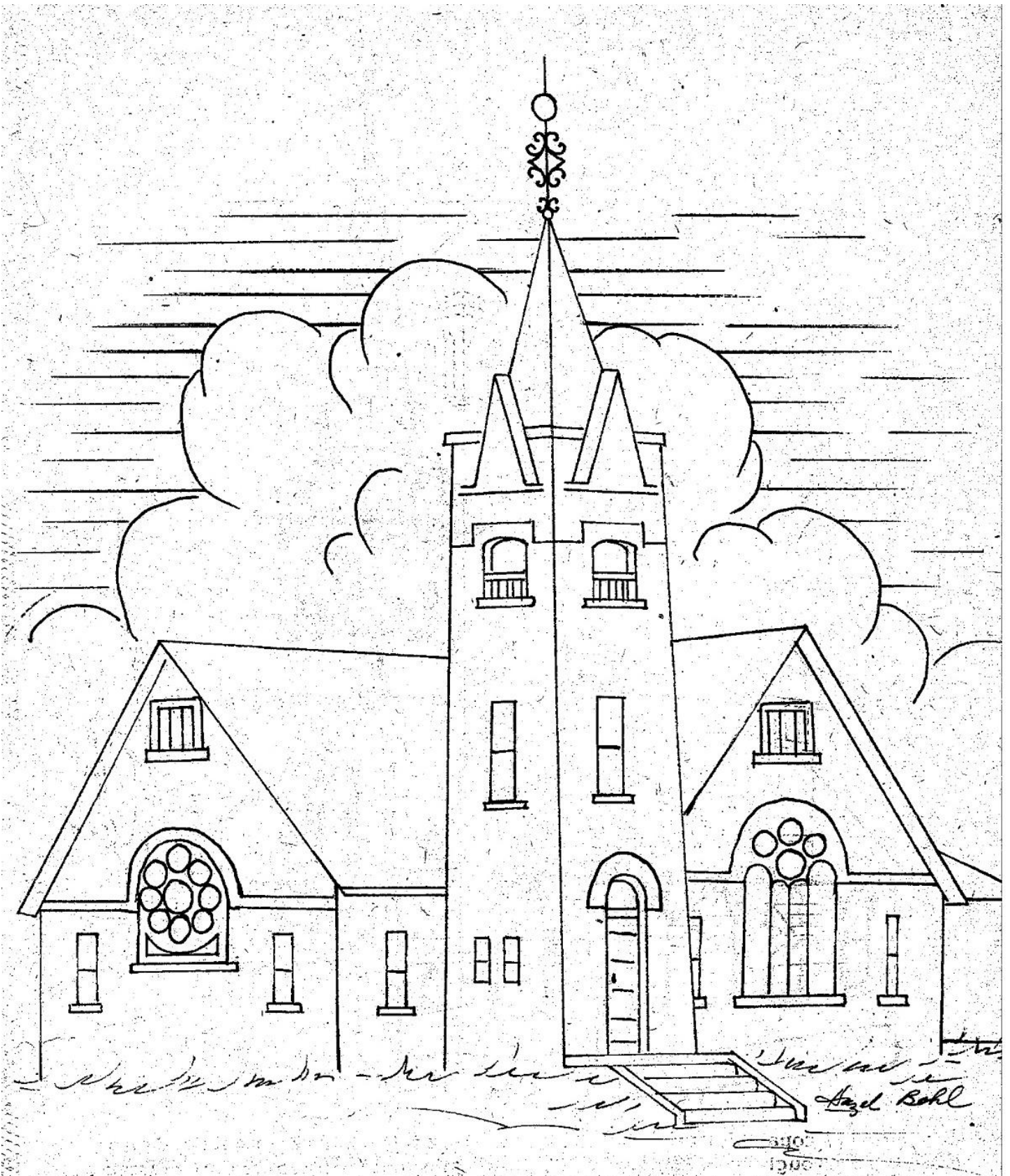
The settlement's religious life was strongly influenced by the immigrants and American-born pioneers. They brought with them their traditions and customs which became a part of the settlement. The church became the most important institution, religiously and socially, in pioneer life.



The Baptist Church was the first denomination to organize in the new settlement.



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Before St. Mary Catholic Church was built in 1898, services were held at the Collins Drug Store and the Grand Opera House.

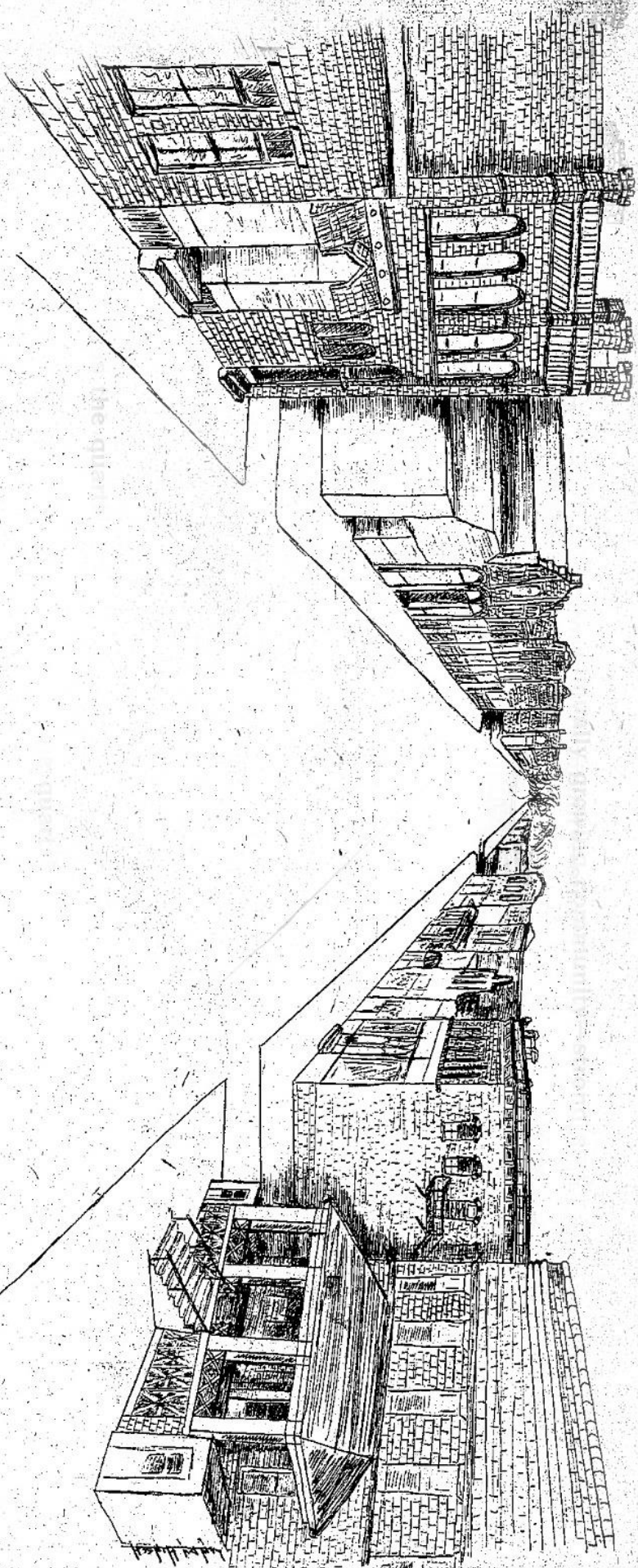


The Lutheran Church was built of pink quartzite in 1902.



When the Episcopal Church was built in the 1890's, a thirteenth century stained glass window was brought from England by the Crisp family and presented to the congregation.

Dell Rapids today—a continually growing community—strong as the quartzite buildings which dominate this Main Street.



\$2.00

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