

Bridal Veil Creek: Veterans, army surplus, art, and more

BY CHARLIE MAGUIRE

Even before I moved from northern Wisconsin to Minneapolis in the early 1970s, Harris Warehouse and Canvas Sales was well known to me. Little two-by-three-inch ads in the *Duluth News Tribune*, and probably a lot of other regional papers, extolled the workmanship of their canvas fish houses (long before anglers moved into wood and aluminum shelters on the lake ice), and included in those ads was just a quick sampling of their US government surplus treasures.

Located between the present-day Como and Prospect Park neighborhoods on land on or about 501 30th Avenue SE, the store had a phone that rang constantly in those days with customers mainly wanting to know where the place was located. Lost in the maze of railroad tracks and grain elevators (look for United Crushers next time you are in the area), it was not the retail center of Minneapolis unless you were into outdoor gear predating the light, luxurious, and expensive REI or Patagonia offerings.

Snowshoes and skis used by the 10th Mountain Division, rucksacks, canteens, parkas, shoebags, mittens, “Bunny” boots (WWII white felt winter combat wear), WWII navy aviators’ shark repellent, and mess kits were some of the listings, mostly in new or excellent condition with affordable price tags. Part store, part museum, I probably visited the place once a month from 1974 until it closed for good just a few years ago—almost 40 years of buying, trading, and just plain browsing.

Harris Warehouse reached its peak around 1996 when the surplus and camping even surpassed Harris Machinery, which had been around since 1928, “as the oldest continuous machinery dealer in the Twin Cities.”¹ Founded by Marks Harris, “a scrap iron peddler with a horse and wagon,”² to hear old-timers tell it, no rusty scrap heap was too bad off to consider. He even pulled a sunken steel boat out of the Mississippi River and sold it. Later on his son Sig, a US Navy veteran of Okinawa, sold a “complete United States Government gunpowder plant piece by piece until it was all gone.”³

Before there was the Harris-heaven-of-army-surplus, there was the Gray Tractor company (1917) which manufactured an 18-horsepower tractor powerful enough to pull a four-bottom plow and be competitive with International Harvester, located just a little farther east on University Avenue.

Before that another veteran, this time of the Mexican and Civil Wars with a bent for inventions, Lt. Colonel Francis Peteler, established the Peteler Portable Railway Manufacturing Company, known for manufacturing and marketing the first railroad side-dump car in 1889. Made almost entirely of wood, the bed of the car tipped, allowing it to be easily unloaded and returned to the railroad construction site.

Colonel Peteler (1828–1910) was quite a character. During the Mexican War he served with George E. Pickett and James Longstreet, who later were high ranking-officers in the Confederate Army. Peteler organized the “second body of Minnesota troops”⁴ to come to the aid of the Union in 1861, served at the Second Battle of Bull Run, and was later furloughed back to Minnesota in 1863 to look after his family as a result of the Dakota War of 1862.

Peteler had a farm in Bloomington and supervised 100 employees at his factory, but despite a merger with another machinery company shortly before his death in 1907, the enterprise went bankrupt seven years later, as portable power like Gray Tractor slowly replaced the railroad business on the site.

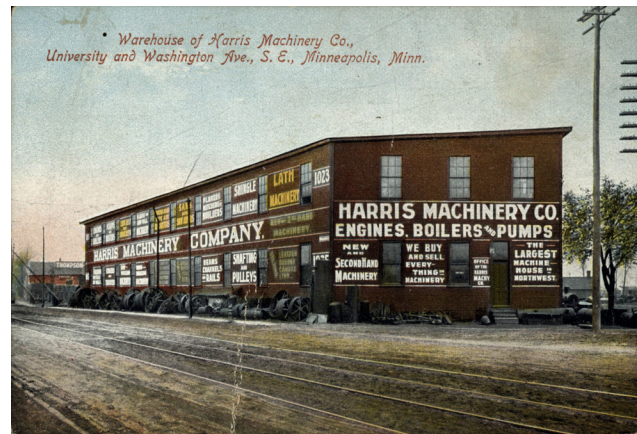
Even before Peteler settled in that section of Minneapolis, it was known as “Bridal Veil Creek,” named after a stream now long

gone that drained into wetlands close by the Mississippi River. The rapid development of the area was due in part to the flat, easily fillable land upon which the railroads laid easy track, and the timber and grain milling around Saint Anthony Falls provided an easy way of getting the product out to the rest of the nation.

Today Bridal Veil Creek is known by the less picturesque name of Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area or SEMI for short, and one might think that the story ends there, but on top of veterans establishing companies and selling the leftovers of World Wars, there is also an artistic side to land as well.

Arnold Ness Klagstad (1898–1954), the son of a Minneapolis “church altar and portrait painter,”⁵ for some reason set up his easel in 1933 as a member of President Franklin Roosevelt’s New Deal Public Works of Art Project (PWAP) and set down in oil on canvas “Archer Daniel Midland Elevator,” a 23-by-29-inch painting that included a sign advertising Harris Machinery.

Roosevelt once quipped that “One hundred years from now my



Harris Machinery Company, date unknown. Postcard courtesy Hennepin County Library.



“Archer Daniel Midland” by Arnold Ness Klagstad, 1933, courtesy Smithsonian American Art Museum and its Renwick Gallery.



Entrance to Harris Warehouse & Canvas on 30th Avenue SE, Minneapolis.

Administration will be known for its art, not for its relief.” And he may be right: During the run of the PWAP, which a couple of years later became the WPA, 10,000 artists, paid an average wage of \$53 a month, produced 100,000 paintings, 18,000 sculptures, 13,000 prints, 4,000 murals, and “innumerable posters and photographs.”⁶

No less than Gutzon Borglum, creator of the Mount Rushmore National Memorial, said, “Aid to the creative ones among us would enliven the nation’s mind and coax the soul of America back to life.”

And lifegiving it was for Arnold Klagstad, who was a US Navy radio operator during WWI perhaps felt the pull of other veterans past and future, and made his own contribution to that industrial landscape a short distance from where he lived with his parents at 4220 Park Avenue in Minneapolis.

The painting, now in the Smithsonian American Art Museum collection, exquisitely details the area as it looked 85 years ago (and for all practical purposes remained so until just recently), as a “sight for sore eyes” reminder of a street I traveled whenever I needed some new gear. No need to ask for directions anymore! Just look at the picture for those past generations of sportsmen and women, we know exactly where we are.

PUT ON YOUR FLASHERS: While it was easy to park when Harris was open, now it’s a working construction site. But a glimpse of the old buildings can still be seen from the University of Minnesota’s Transitway bike path off 30th Avenue SE, Minneapolis.

Charlie Maguire is a traveling songwriter, musician, and union organizer who makes frequent stops in Hennepin County.

NOTES

- ¹ *The Junction of Industry and Freight: The Development of the Southeast Minneapolis Industrial Area.* A National Register Assessment, Minneapolis Community Development Agency. <http://www.sanfordberman.org/hist/harrw/harhist.pdf>
- ² Ibid.
- ³ Aron Kahn, “Gadgets and Doodads of the Industrial Age.” *Saint Paul Pioneer Press*, July 4, 2006.
- ⁴ Albert M. Goodrich, *History of Anoka County, 1905.* www.sanfordberman.org.
- ⁵ Arnold Ness Klagstad. www.ancestry.com.
- ⁶ Ann Prentice Wagner, *1934: A New Deal for Artists* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian American Art Museum, 2009), 13.



LEFT: 10th Mountain Division “Bunny” boots
RIGHT: Author digging through a dumpster of discarded surplus after Harris Warehouse closed, August 2015

Photos provided by Charlie Maguire.



BRIDGING THE PAST

Malcolm Yards Market

What makes a place special? New buildings are new buildings anywhere they’re built. A new building in northern Hennepin County looks pretty much like a new one built in the southern US. But 100 years ago, builders used local materials and local designers and craftspeople. Cities looked different from each other; their distinctive architectural character defined regions. Adobes were built in the southwest; Art Deco skyscrapers sprang up in New York; Art Deco hotels became emblematic of Miami; Chicago pioneered the International Style. Different regions had different looks. Walk around the downtowns in Hennepin County and you can see rocks quarried in Mankato, St. Cloud, Morton, and Lake Superior. Cream-colored Chaska brick, made just across the southwestern border of Hennepin County, is recognizable on many houses, churches, and commercial buildings, including the Grain Belt Brewery. Other parts of the country used their own local materials too.

Developers who incorporate historic preservation into their projects keep history alive. In 2020 Prospect Park residents will see a former historic site — most recently an eyesore — turned into an appetizing neighborhood hub.

Malcolm Yards Market will be the centerpiece of a new development in a once-forlorn parcel near the University of Minnesota. Numerous grain elevators and old industrial buildings once covered that property. Slowly the area’s been transitioning. As the vacant concrete and steel elevators came down, new university medical and research buildings, along with TCF Stadium, took hold in the western portion. Surly Brewing Co. opened on the eastern end. On University Avenue and toward the massive Burlington Northern Santé Fe Railroad tracks, apartments are rising. Right through the middle of it all cuts the University of Minnesota’s Transitway and bike trail.

For the last ten years, Minneapolis-based Wall Companies has been buying up pieces of property in the area. Their 20-acre site is currently being developed into a brandnew neighborhood called Malcolm Yards. The mixed-use, multiple-building project will contain a wide variety of housing types, commercial offices, and retail, and will be intermixed with a vast outdoor park dotted with public art — all in the shadow of the Urban Crushers grain elevator that they own too. Right in the middle of it all will be the Malcolm Yards Market.

Wall Companies is a family-run redevelopment company started by Fred Wall. His son John is currently president and developing the Malcolm Yards neighborhood. Daughter Elizabeth is vice president of acquisitions. Another son, Rick, is CEO of Highland Banks, an additional family business. Wall Companies has developed, owned, or renovated more than 1,200 apartments and condominiums and two million square feet of retail, office, and industrial property. Malcolm Yards Market was the brainchild of Patricia Wall, John’s wife and partner in the business. Patricia has a culinary background and worked in kitchens in Washington, DC, and planned catering events for



To prevent the walls from caving in, steel supports and joists attached to concrete blocks shore up the building’s exterior. The raw interior still contains abandoned machinery, timber supports, and modern graffiti.





Dayton's and Kitchen Window. On a recent vacation in Vancouver, the bustling food hall Granville Island Public Market inspired her, and she thought Minneapolis needed a place like it.

In 2016 one of the main structures on the property was set on fire. The Harris Manufacturing building, built in the 1890s, lost its roof but the two-story, solidly built brick structure was still standing. Wall Companies, along with Hopkins-based Wilkus Architects, drew up plans to save the structure and designed the food hall inside it. Patricia says it's more work to save the old structure – and more costly – but Wall Companies believes that kind of character can't be recreated. The old-growth rugged timber beams will remain along with a few random scales, rails, and side-dumping cars that were left in place and survived the fire.

Malcolm Yards Market will contain nine food tenants, a full bar, plenty of seating, an event room, an outdoor patio, and a nearby Irish whiskey distillery. It's set to open in early fall of 2020.

People gravitate to historic spaces. Malcolm Yards Market will be a new special place in Hennepin County that celebrates the past while moving into the future.

Images provided by Wall Companies.



See a movie by Wilkus Architects about the existing historic building on Facebook @MalcolmYards or at <https://bit.ly/2n7klmF>.

MALCOLM YARDS MARKET
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Artistic rendering of Malcom Yards Market by Wilkus Architects

