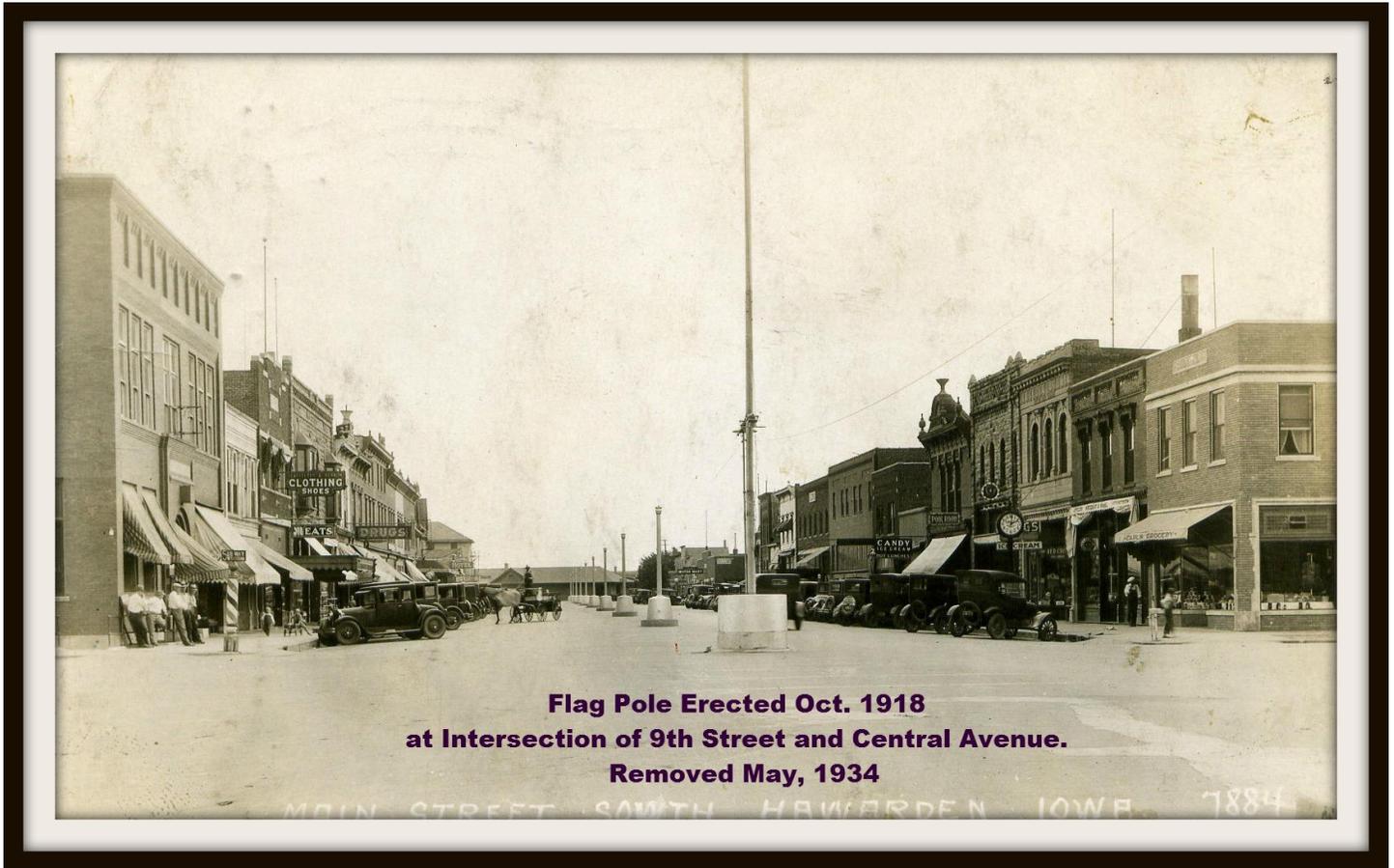


HAWARDEN...HOW IT ALL BEGAN  
THE MORNING IT RAINED CONCRETE

Chapter 21

By: Mary Truesdell Johnson

From the October 3, 1918 Hawarden Independent: *"The patriotic citizens of Hawarden and the surrounding territory have arranged for the erection of an 80 foot flagpole, from the top of which Old Glory will continuously send forth a message of patriotism for all time to come. As our President has asked that October 12, 1918 be set aside as a national holiday it has been deemed a most appropriate time for the dedication of the new flag pole and the raising of the flag."*



Times change: From the May 24, 1934 Hawarden Independent (only 16 years later): *"Although never lacking in patriotic fervor, Hawarden has finally adopted a **more subdued method of exhibiting its spirit**. The huge steel flag pole which has adorned the intersection of ninth and Central since the World War was removed on Saturday....and will be placed in the City Park where Old Glory will henceforth be raised to flutter in the breeze."* The article continues; but the last sentence may surprise many of you: It certainly surprised me. It reads: *"The huge concrete base in which the pole was imbedded will be removed from the intersection. **It was felt by many that the location of the flag pole at the street intersection smacked of provincialism and was scarcely in keeping with the progress of a modern small city.**"* Definition of **provincialism**: *"narrow-mindedness and lack of sophistication". UNBELIEVABLE! I can think of many reasons to relocate a flag pole, but not because it was unsophisticated and not in keeping with the progress of a modern small city. Hopefully this was only the opinion of the reporter and not the entire town.*

On with the story. In the May 24, 1934 edition of the Hawarden Independent it was promised that the huge concrete base that held the 80 foot flag pole would be removed during the week. How it was removed was a surprise to everyone.

*"On Friday of last week two city employees spent the entire day with pick axes and sledge hammers trying to crack and remove the cement structure that held the flag pole."* By evening the two workers were exhausted and the cement

was still intact. The two men found Councilman Andrew McBride, chairman of the Street and Alley Committee and told him of their dilemma. Councilman Mc Bride was willing to assist the men and they went to the light plant and inquired about using dynamite to complete the job. Councilman McBride was told that the City did not possess any dynamite, but suggested that he contact Lou Heeren who might use dynamite in his well-drilling business. Mr. Heeren assured Councilman McBride that he had the dynamite and he could crack the base so the workmen could proceed in removing it.

Around 8 A.M. on Saturday morning, Lou Heeren and Councilman McBride met at the site of the flagpole base. There was a little discussion as to the most effective method to pursue, and Mr. Heeren concluded that the job presented no particular difficulty. The hollow steel end of the flag pole was still embedded in the concrete where it had been cut off when the pole was removed. The base was full of water. After some thought, Lou Heeren determined that **five** sticks of dynamite should do the job. He tied them together, attached a water proof fuse, dropped the dynamite into the hollow tube, told the spectators to move back, and lit the fuse. Mr. Heeren then nonchalantly walked to his truck remarking, "Well there she goes."

"There she goes" hardly describes the scene that followed. The deafening explosion shook the entire town. The huge concrete base was blown into a million pieces of every size. Huge chunks of concrete and re-enforced steel were thrown into the air to a height of more than one hundred feet, crashing through store windows and automobile windshields. Many large pieces were hurled through the air for more than one-half block and smaller pieces were found over a block and one-half away. Fortunately only a few spectators were injured and none of them seriously. A Metz Baking Company delivery truck was parked on the north side of Carl Olsen's grocery store on the south west corner of the intersection. The driver's nine year old son had remained in the truck while his dad made his deliveries. You can imagine his reaction as the windshield was shattered and pieces of concrete and glass showered down on the young boy. Luckily he escaped with only a cut hand. The early hour of the morning was credited to the small amount of injuries, as the shoppers had not yet arrived to do their business.

After the shower of concrete, the damage was assessed: eight window lights in the Masonic Hall (now the apartment above Impressions 2000) were shattered and large pieces of concrete were scattered inside of the building, two plate glass windows in the First National Bank on the first floor were broken, and even the barber shop of Earl Mallette in the basement had broken windows. The next building south was York Johnson's Shoe Store (now That Other Computer Guy). The plate glass windows as well as inner windows were broke in that store and shoes displayed in the windows were damaged. A hole about four inches in diameter was in the window of Gant's Meat Market, (now Agency One Services). The face of the large clock on the west sidewalk in front of the jewelry store (now In Weave Rugs) was smashed. The Hawarden State Bank Building across the street to the north had a long piece of re-enforced steel fly through the transom window over the door. The concrete, glass and debris that covered Main Street was unbelievable. I have been told that even now, over seventy-five years later, pieces of concrete can still be found on the roof tops of many main street stores. The concrete base that the dynamite was meant to crack was completely razed, leaving only a few pieces of steel standing upright as survivors of the battle.

Plate glass windows were rushed to Hawarden that very day and most of the windows were repaired by evening, with the City of Hawarden assuming the cost of damages. How long it took to clean up the chunks of cement and debris is any one's guess.

Stories told by residents who still remember that day report that the last anyone saw of Lou Heeren that Saturday morning was the tail lights of his truck headed west toward Alcester.<sup>i</sup>

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<sup>i</sup> October 3, 1918: Hawarden Independent  
May 24, 1934: Hawarden Independent  
May 31, 1934: Hawarden Independent  
Hawarden Centennial Book: Page 906