

A Babbling Brook Downtown?

Tales of Earlier Days

By Bob Dewel

A babbling brook in downtown Baraboo? Less than 75 years ago? It seems hard to believe, but there was, at least "sort of", a babbling brook—Trimpey's brook. A description will follow.

Ask any really old-timers. They will remember the little "brook". They will also remember photographer Trimpey, Burt Trimpey. Actually, Ephraim Burt Trimpey, who was born in 1878 in Pennsylvania. He arrived in Baraboo in 1910 and quickly became a person of interest.

He soon occupied the Mould photographic studio which dated from 1887—you can still see the word Mould outside over the great west window of the Garden Party Restaurant at 527 Oak Street.

By 1921, however, Burt Trimpey had purchased the historical property at 128 Fourth Avenue. There he erected a building designed by one of Frank Lloyd Wright's associates, William E Smith. That highly unusual facade is gone now, the space being occupied today by the theatre's Stage III building with the four square white pillars. These date to

occupation of the site by the Savings and Loan Bank a couple decades ago.

Trimpey soon established himself as sort of an avant-garde character in the city, innovative and enterprising in both his personal life style and his photographic occupation. He and his equally interesting wife, Alice Kent Trimpey, sometimes dressed in period styles and photographed themselves. His photos of Zona Gale, August Derleth, and acrobat Jennie Rooney were artistically superb.

In her own right, Alice had a significant collection of period dolls, later donated and available today at the State Historical Society, as are his self-photographs and photos of local scenes and people. Alice also wrote two books based on the doll collection, which was once featured in *The Christian Science Monitor* in Boston. She was 20 years senior to Burt.

The new building featured not only Trimpey's photos but Alice's dolls, and an assortment of antiques, many for sale. Unusual for a downtown business was a fireplace, and "roomy bookcases fill the inglenooks". Upstairs were more antiques, and for a short time the upper level also was a Chinese restaurant, unique in those days to small towns.

The treatment of the land at the rear of the building was a matter on considerable note by a local newspaper. A little rear garden was developed "from an ash pit to a green plot surrounded by a neat fence. "Here is a winding path with stepping stones, a tiny stream bubbling over rock into a tiny pond...with a background of white birches and ferns." Some of this can be seen in the attached pictures.



Sauk County Historical Society

Left: E.B. Trimpey in the rear garden. Right: The south façade, showing the home-like second story. A petunia planter spanned the width of the building.

So there you have it, a small babbling brook in downtown Baraboo. There is much more on the Trimpey's, available at the Sauk County Historical Society. The Trimpey's were unusual people indeed, and were for some time were a tourist attraction.



Trimpey studio, rear. From the Yvonne Brougher DeLuke collection

The rear of the Trimpey building featured a rock garden and a rustic setting. Presumably the little brook originated in the rocks, perhaps going to a pool. Note the suggestion of Frank Lloyd Wright styling of the rear of the building. Note also the plantings on the roof, which would be to the rear of the home-like structure on the second story. See the adjoining photo for the front façade of the building.