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The Second Boat Plant

St. Norbert College

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THE SECOND BOAT PLANT

As mentioned in the Chronological Report, Grandpa Dan's first boat building shop, erected in 1874 on the river bank burned to the ground in 1887. The French Church, later called St. Joseph Church, burned in 1889 and Grandpa Dan worked at rebuilding the church as recorded previously. Dan very likely built some smaller boats in the shed at the homestead during this time.

The new boat building plant was completed in 1891, and located approximately 250' east of the intersection of Butler Street (now College Avenue) and Second Street in West De Pere. It was on the south side of Butler Street near the site of Main Hall (the old Administration Building) on the present St. Norbert College campus. It was a two story building, forty by forty feet. The first floor was used for boat construction and the second floor was used for finishing and storage. There was an outside ramp or run from the second floor to the ground. Behind this building and attached to it, was a two story north-south wing, forty by fifty-five feet. Boat construction was done on the first floor. An office was located in the northwest corner on this floor. The second floor was used for storage. Behind these two building units was a one story forty by forty building which housed the woodworking machinery. At the junction of these three units was a small building where the boiler was located.

I viewed some fire maps that were plotted in the 1800's at the Brown County main library in Green Bay. They accurately show the second plant buildings, their size and location on the property. These are amazing maps, showed outside lumber
THE SECOND BOAT PLANT

stocks, the outside privy, location of wood fueled heating stoves and other characteristics of the property. There were few electric lights in the building, hence the large windows shown in the sketch of the second shop. There were fifteen employees at this time and the boat building line was expanded to include many additional models of hunting boats and rowboats. A few smaller power boats were built at this plant beginning about 1894. As orders for larger boats began coming in, Grandpa Dad began to think about a larger plant and plans for a new plant were being developed.

It was about 1899 when Abbot Bernard Pennings, the new rector at St. Norbert College complained about 'Kidney trouble'. He envisioned a growing campus on the land that Dan Kidney owned.

On August 31, 1901, this factory complex was sold to the Norbertine Fathers for $2,200.00 as shown on a copy of the original deed furnished by Father Dennis Burke of St. Norbert College. The sale also included Lots 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 of the Lessey Addition between Butler and Millar Streets. One of the buildings, probably the north-south wing, 40' x 55', was moved farther south on the east side of Second Street, renovated and used as the first gymnasium by the College. An article in the October 3, 1905, issue of the Green Bay Gazette states: "The old Kidney Boat building is being completely remodeled into a gymnasium for the students of St. Norbert College". This building was used for four years before being destroyed by fire. After the sale of the second plant property, construction was begun on a new all purpose building on the site of the second boat factory building and partially on the vacated Butler Street. This new structure was called St. Norbert College and later renamed Main Hall. The early students were housed and attended classes in the abbey building located just east of the church. All activities of the students were now housed in this building. It was the College at the time. Butler Street had been vacated by the city from Second Street to the river and vacated from Third Street to Second Street at a later date.

Main Hall presently is listed in the National Register of Historical Places.