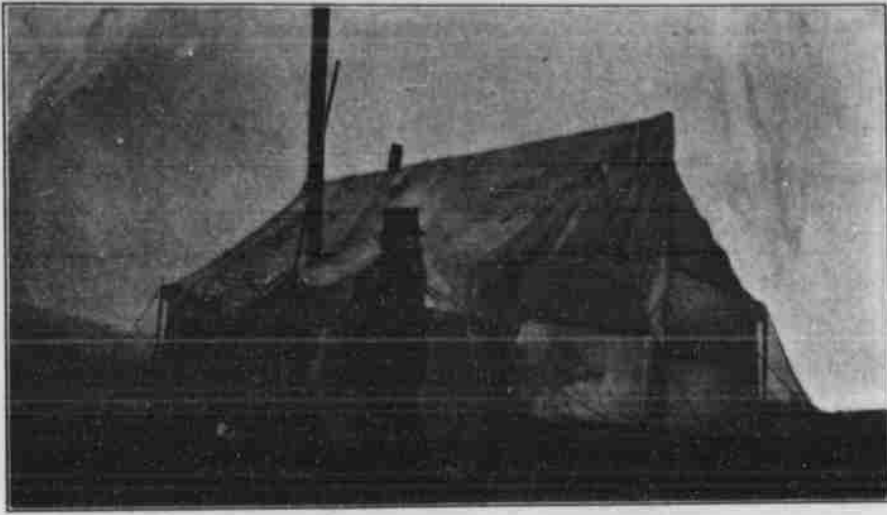


# Streeter's Struggle for Chicago Real Estate



"CAP" STREETER IN FRONT OF HIS SUMMER HEADQUARTERS.

to watch the "Cap," who sat undisturbed under the shadow of a growing war cloud. He was throned in a cane bottom rocking chair, on a mound before the courthouse, while small boys and reporters flocked about him. Cap's forty men fingered their stars and revolvers, ordered the small boys about, talked of what they would do to the police, and one by one crawled under a barbwire fence and faded away.

Not until the next morning could the police complete their preparations for the first battle. In the north side headquarters, on Chicago avenue, Inspector Max Heideimeier gathered 200 bluecoats and along toward noon these advanced to the attack. They moved in wagons and on foot, with "Maxie" at their head. As on the day before, "Cap" sat peacefully in his rocking chair before the court house—unattended now save for the spectators, while a lake breeze toyed with his famous red whiskers. "Cap" was reading a newspaper and when he heard—or if he heard—the advancing army of bluecoats that, led



THE DEAD LINE AT STREETERVILLE.

**F**EW are aware that we are engaged in a civil war today—a war between states, in which hundreds of men have been engaged, forts have been captured, shots exchanged and all the elements of a comic opera except the music provided. One of the states, to be sure, is not yet on the government maps, but it is struggling hard for recognition, and it is this struggle which has led to the great war between the state of Illinois, through its chief city of Chicago, and the independent district of Lake Michigan, better known as "Cap" Streeter's "deestric." The war of the rebellion was fought over "rights." So is the present war.

"Do you know what them fellers claims?" Captain Streeter demanded one day of a reporter. "Lemme tell ye what they claims. They claims ripairin' rights, that's what they claims."

"What is ripairin' rights? Lemme tell ye what they is. Ripairin' rights is the rights to ri-pair yer shore where t's wore off by the water. Don't g'en ye no more right to fill in the lake an' own the fillin' 'an it does me to dig a hole in yer front yard an' own th' hole."

And, acting on his belief in the correctness of that statement, Captain Streeter has seized 186 acres of the choicest lands in Chicago, lying along the lake front north of the river, and has there organized the "Independent District of Lake Michigan." The leaders in its government have applied to congress for recognition as one of the sovereign states of the union, and meanwhile they are struggling by force of arms with the Chicago police for the life of their commonwealth.

This strange affair is the direct fault of a well meaning and industrious surveyor named John Wall, who was sent by the Washington authorities in 1821 to survey the ground they were about to buy from the Indians. A town site was desired at the mouth of Chicago river, and Wall was ordered to survey a strip twenty miles along the lake shore north from the Calumet river and running thence southwest-erly. All would have been well had he bounded it on the east by the "waters of Lake Michigan," but instead he "meandered" the shore line, surveying each little crook in it and describing in his maps and field book a definite number of miles and acres bounded on the east not by the lake, but by the meandered shore line as it then existed. When this land was put on the market Robert Kinzie bought the north half of fractional section 10 of township 39, range 14 east of the third principal meridian, consisting of 103.27 acres, definitely bounded.

Outside of the shore line was a sandbar, sometimes appearing above the water. That sandbar gradually grew, was by fillings connected by the shore, and as Robert Kinzie's holdings became divided up those who had them gradually came to look upon the "accreted" land as their own. They set up, for the rest of the city to worship at a fetish called "riparian rights," which gave them ownership of all land outside of their shore line. But they were hindered from giving title by an early government decision that they held only a definite number of acres secured under the Kinzie grant, and which in total could never exceed 103.27. This was the situation in 1856, when Streeter first appeared.

This George Wellington Streeter, mariner and fighter, is a doughty little man, full of "scrap" to the top of his head, red whiskered, decorated with freckles that resemble blotches of red, equipped with endless argument, and always ready to take up the cudgel in any good cause in which he has a financial interest. Being a squatter of experience he looked up the title to the lake front lands, saw it was disputable, and in an old steamer—the Ruetan—set out one evening in June, 1856, from the Calumet river, ostensibly for Milwaukee with him went Maria, his wife.

By some inexplicable chance the engine of the Ruetan became disabled when she was just northeast of the filled land, and as the wind—purely by good fortune—was northeasterly, the craft was driven ashore and "Cap" and Maria were ingloriously cast up just where they wanted to be. They hauled up their craft with the aid of a watchman, and next day built a stockade about it. Thus they squatted, and for several years they defended this stockade



FORT HELD BY SIXTEEN MEN AGAINST TWO HUNDRED POLICEMEN.

against all comers by liberal use of hot water from Maria's tea kettle.

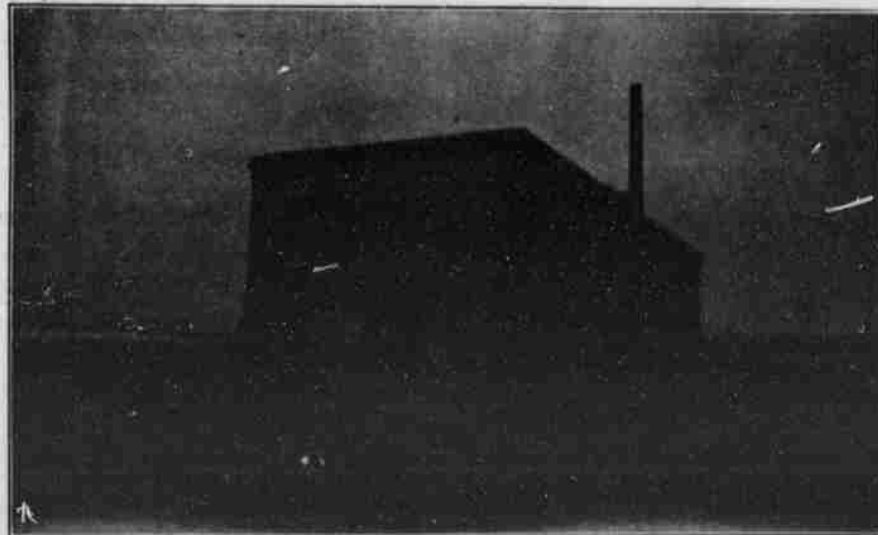
Once settled on the land Streeter promptly filed a homestead claim with the Washington authorities. He was politely informed that he was squatting in the water, being a quarter of a mile outside the shore line surveyed by Wall. Nothing daunted, and satisfied that he could stand the water during the summer months, he secured some unused Mexican war script and filed that on the land. Again he received the reply that he was obstructing navigation with his house. So he wrote to the Washington authorities that he was convinced that this was land, and dry land at that, and as they had apparently overlooked it, and as all claims in this country date from the government, he therefore claimed this as its discoverer.

Holty, toity! There was a terrible do, to be sure! The shore owners began to cry loudly "riparian rights," and ordered the police to run Streeter off. They began steps to get the land surveyed and placed on the county map so they could pay taxes on it and establish a claim. They succeeded in ousting Streeter temporarily, made a deal with the Lincoln Park board and the state legislature, built a boulevard half a mile out in the lake and gave it to the state, filled in the pond back of it, dedicated the continued streets, and were given by the state title to the reclaimed lands.

But Streeter was before and after them, claiming that the state never had the title to give, in this twenty-mile strip surveyed by Wall. Then Streeter sold and gave away enough of the lots to interest capitalists and workers, and shortly organized the Independent District of Lake Michigan. That is how we come to have one more sovereign body than most of us know about, and a civil war that has upset the peace of at least half a dozen millionaire land owners. For the filled lands of the "Deestric" are already worth at least \$25,000,000.

It was on May 5, 1859, that war was declared by the District against Chicago. It was a quiet day to begin with, but along toward noon sounds of war were heard growing loud in the distance. Over Rush street bridge in martial array came an army of forty men. Streeter at their head, with banner and drum, marching to seize their country. Streeter's red whiskers wagged, and his shiny silk hat nodded to acquaintances along the way—for he is "Cap" to half Chicago—and the sunlight glistened from enormous nickel plated stars on the bosoms of the army. They were self-constituted "United States marshals" for the "Deestric," and the bosoms behind the stars were filled with war sentiment. They went up Rush street to Ontario and out on to the filling, stuck a flagstaff in the ground, pasted a sign on a shanty to serve as a courthouse. George Wellington Streeter, Clerk," labeled another shanty "Capital," and so completed the occupation.

"Now, b-gosh, let them fellers come," said Streeter. "We'll show 'em now. b'gosh. We got th' United States on our side, an' they ain't a-goin' to buck up agin th' govament. This ain't Illiny here, an' them fellers ain't got no rights in this Deestric." If an army of cops comes over here I'll arrest 'em, b'gosh." Crowds of north side citizens gathered



ONE OF THE HOUSES BUILT IN STREETER DISTRICT.

by "Maxie," stole softly through a hole in the fence and massed before him, he made no sign. But the crowd was visibly nervous, the bluecoats even more so, and "Maxie" most of all.

Suddenly stepping three paces forward the inspector threw up his right hand. All Chicago recognized the gesture and shuddered. "Maxie" had taken the "Haymarket" attitude, copying as faithfully as his portly figure would allow the graceful bronze officer who guards the scene of the anarchist riots. When a Chicago police officer strikes that attitude the citizens know there is "something doing." So they awaited the next move in breathless silence. Each of the 200 bluecoats nervously fingered his pistol.

At this instant, in a voice meant to be thunderous, "Maxie" repeated the words graven at the foot of the statue:

"In der name of der beebles of Illinois, I gommands beance."

There was no response from "Cap," who still read his paper.

"In der name of der beebles of Illinois, I gommand you to disperse."

"Hold on thar," came from Streeter. "I can't disperse. They ain't but one o' me. I'd do it if I could, Max, but I can't."

True enough, the army had abandoned its leader and he had not even a club for a weapon. The bluecoats looked relieved and drew nearer.

"Vell, you got to go oud mid here," said the inspector, relaxing his attitude.

"I won't go except by force," said the captain, and so he was borne in his chair to a patrol wagon and then to the station and booked for refusal to disperse when so ordered. Next day when the justice read the charge he let "Cap" go, as it was manifestly impossible for him to have obeyed the order.

So the first armed invasion of the Independent District of Lake Michigan by the forces of Illinois resulted in the temporary overthrow of the young republic and a victory for the state. But it would not be according to the spirit of the American people to give in after a single defeat, and "Cap" is of long generations American. In the months that followed he gradually organized an army, giving building lots to soldiers who agreed to fight for

their homes. He made his headquarters on the parlor floor of a leading downtown hostelry and apparently was well provided with funds—a novel situation for the weather bureau squatter. Maria revealed in new bonnets of gorgeous construction and their affairs were prosperous. Incidentally "Cap" roused up as the commander-in-chief of his forces one William H. Niles, ex-cowboy, expert rifle and pistol shot and soldier of fortune, who was also constituted justice of the peace in the "deestric."

General Niles planned well and secretly. In the still hours of a May night in 1900 he embarked an army of sixteen men, a case of Springfield and Winchester rifles, cartridges and provisions, on the navy of the District—an old fishing sloop, and transported them to the shore of the disputed land. There they landed, and when daylight came they had constructed two forts, sunk below the ground, with ramparts and roofs, and with a slit in each for firing through, commanding Superior street, and, in fact, the whole district. The forts were

their march a boulevard "sparrow cop" strolled along the sea beach on his regular round toward the forts. Niles beckoned him over.

"Say," said Niles, "we come here to prove we got a right to. We fired our guns and scared them fellers off. Now, we don't want to hurt nobody, so we'll jes' surrender to you."

And so, it happened that as the advancing 600 bluecoats came in sight, headed by the valiant Heideimeier, they beheld the Immortal Five, Niles at their head, marching up Superior street in charge of a gray coated "sparrow cop." It was a bitter moment for the force.

So the second invasion was ended. Of course, Niles and his band were tried. The plain clothes men testified that Niles had fired eleven shots in quick succession, but when they found his rifle was but a five-shooter and had two cartridges still in it, they withdrew the evidence. And Niles and his men were discharged from custody.

That was the end of open hostilities between the state of Illinois and the district. The "cap" had found armed resistance a failure.

"The best way to fight them fellers," he said, "is to git 'em on your side."

So he began an insidious attack on the city authorities, which has resulted in placing him—no one knows exactly how—high in the favor of certain aldermen and officials. With this treasonable assistance from the camp of the enemy he has obtained Chicago building permits and through his followers has erected several "houses" on the "deestric," which are occupied by those who have bought the land of him.

All this has thrown the controversy where it belonged in the first place—into the courts. For the shore owners, bringing suit for trespass against the captain—who, having the sanction of the city, cannot be ousted by the police—must show what title they have to the land. And that will bring up the question of the Wall survey and the ownership of this particular piece of lake front and may take it away from both of them and give it to the state or to a group of enterprising gentlemen who recently bought title to the original sandbar from the living descendants of the Indians, who sold the rest of the land to the government. But until it is settled the era of peace and good will within these United States will not have arrived and civil war will still be with us.

JOHN L. MATTHEWS.

## Well, Hardly

A small little business woman, who runs a bright store, had an experience with a customer lately which broke her heart—temporarily, of course. A gentleman called at her place, relates the Louisville Times, and ordered a hat for his wife, who did not live here. He was shown everything in the store, and finally selected a shape he wanted trimmed. He was a Miss Nancyish fellow; he looked over the trimmings, feathers, ribbons, laces, flowers, and made his own choice. After giving the most minute directions as to the trimming he walked off. In two days' time he came again to inspect the hat and take it away. He said it was exactly right, the work had been well done, and then he moved off with the box containing it without one word about the price.

The little milliner was in tears. It meant a lot to her, but when she got to thinking about suing him she recalled that she did not know his exact location and had no witness, and that a lawyer's fee would cost more than the hat. When she told her father of the trouble the old man got hot. "I'll pay him for it!" he said, indignantly. "Oh, no, father," sobbed the daughter, "what I want is not to pay him, but make him pay me."

Well, hardly!

## Asking Too Much

Chicago Post: "It is astonishing how inconsiderate people can be!"

"What's the matter now?"

"Why, an amateur dramatic club out our way is going to give an entertainment for charity."

"And they want you to buy some tickets?"

"Oh, it isn't that. I was glad to buy the tickets, but they want us to come and sit through the show."

Meanwhile Niles, having established his occupation, sent all but five of his followers away unobserved in the navy. With the balance he maintained the picket lines and held the city force at bay.

About the time the police started on