PART THREE
HALF-TONE
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OMAHA'S ONE CROOKED STREET HAS ITS OWN STORY

Vinton Street the One Thoroughfare that Deviates from a Straight Line Is the Result of an Effort to Accommodate Purchasers of Building Lots in a Section that Did Not Develop.

OMAHA probably has fewer crooked streets than any city of equal size in the United States. Only three, Vinton street, St. Mary's avenue, and Ames avenue, can be said to swerve from a straight course. Of these, Vinton is the only one that follows a crooked path for any considerable distance, and can well be termed Omaha's only crooked street.

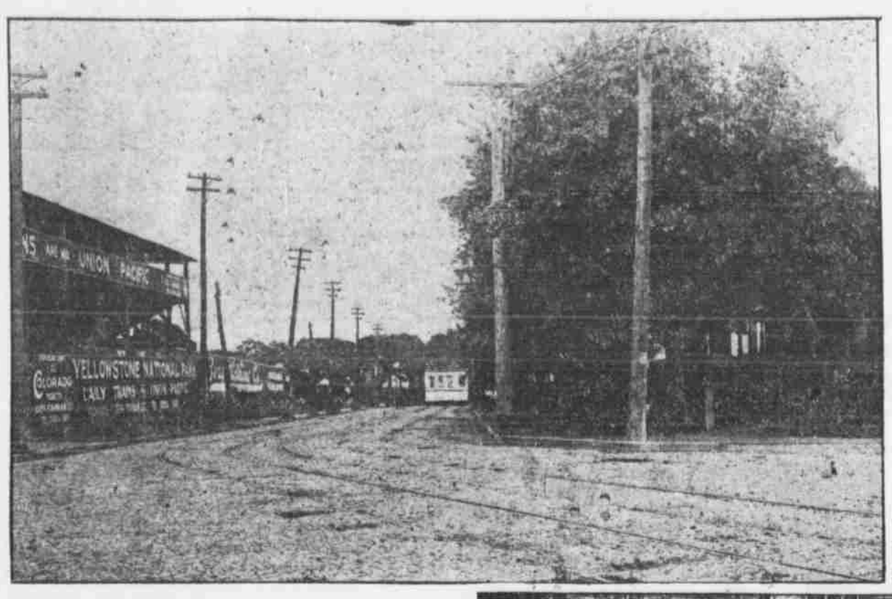
Beginning at Thirteenth street, Vinton runs west to Fifteenth, the location of the Western league base ball park, where its course is deflected southwest for three blocks. A few yards beyond Eighteenth street, Vinton again swerves south, pasing from this point, for three blocks, or until it reaches Twenty-first street, a path that lacks not many degrees of being directly south and north. After reaching Twenty-first street, Vinton follows a straight line west to the city limits.

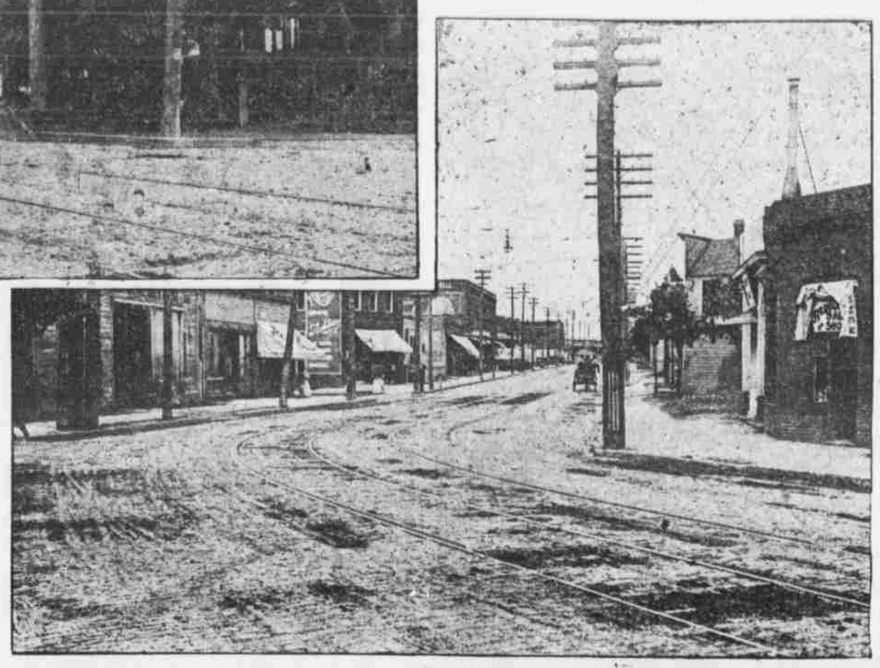
In following its devious course, Vinton is directly approached or entered by a few streets that would be parallel to it were its direction due east and west, as it is for two blocks from the beginning at Thirteenth, and for several blocks west of Twenty-first street.

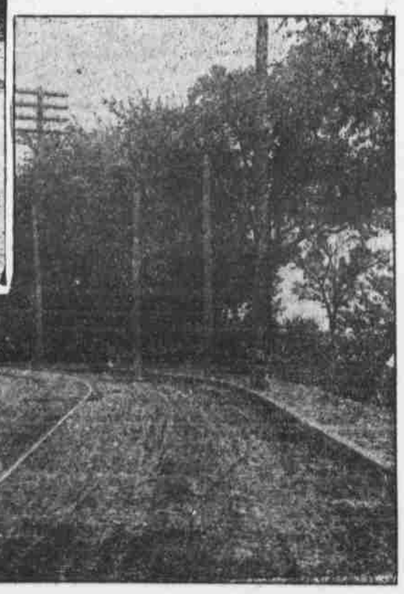
The first of these streets is Bancroft, which opens into Seventeenth street a few yards north of Vinton. Elm street, the next beyond Bancroft, finds a direct outlet into Vinton about half way between Eighteenth and Nineteenth. The first street south of Elm, Oak, opens into Twentieth nearly a block north of Vinton. Spring street enters Vinton at Twentieth, just a block north of the corner at which the crooked route takes a straight course west to the city's edge.

A poet sang in sardonic vein of how one crooked street came into existence. A wobbly-legged calf, lost from its dam, wandered through the woods in search of its dinner, and left a trail that wiggled like an angleworm. Next day a sheep followed the trail of the calf, and then a man wandered over the same route. Soon another passed, and one day some loitering horseman rode along the devious way. Thus it became a footpath, and later a lane, and when a city was builded there the uncertain course along which a day-old calf staggered became its principal thoroughfare. This is intended to show the vagarious origin of some city streets. It is said that in Boston some streets remain whose way is so tortuous that it is possible to go out and come back on the same street without turning about. Such streets must have been in the minds of the engineers who laid out the city of Omaha in its beginning. These were men of broad mind, in the sweep of whose imagination arose a picture of a city fair and great, whose streets were broad as avenues and straight as could be laid by compass. It was not a difficult task. The virgin sheet of paper on which the city was platted would permit of straight lines as well as of crooked, and so the city streets were marked as the "shortest course between two points," intersecting each other at angles as true as ever student fixed for experimental purposes. It mattered not to these men that the way of the thoroughfares thus proposed lay over huge hills, some towering like mountains, apparently inaccessible, save to mountain goats, and that others found their course intercepted by muddy creeks, that sluggishly trickled between the banks of deep ravines or roared in torrential fury when swollen by heavy rains. This airy indifference to the natural contour of the land has cost the survivors of those pioneers not a little worry and contriving, not to speak of several millions in money that have been spent in grading and filling. If the man who made the town site of Omaha in the first place could come back and see it now he would not recognize it for the same place. Hills have vanished, hollows have disappeared, creeks have been swallowed up and left no trace and the dream of the engineers has been patiently wrought out in broad and straight streets that proceed in due order, "square with the world," and crossing each other with mathematical accuracy. The tree-crowned bluffs that reared their heads above the Missouri's banks when the pioneers pitched their first camp here half a century ago have followed the pioneer, and in place of the jack oak, the pig nut and the cottonwood, the box elder and the scrub elm, now stand great piles of brick and mortar, stone and steel, while the lines marked on that virgin sheet of paper are now broadways of commerce, surfaced with asphaltum or brick and traversed daily by many thousands of busy people. It is a dream realized as its dreamers never could have hoped.

Why Vinton street is crooked has never been satisfactorily explained, although the reason given at the city engineer's office is a plausible one. There the blame for the crooked way is placed on the original owners of the property in that part of Omaha that is now cut through by Vinton. The street was not laid out with the original plot of Omaha, but was put through in later years, after lots in the Vinton tract of land had been sold. Men bought lots in various parts of the tract, and the street was allowed to curve so as to pass by these lots as they were purchased. Some lots were sold at Fifteenth street, and the road passed along by these; others, several hundred yards south and west of the lots at Fifteenth, were then sold, and the street had to be made crooked in order to go by these. Such was the manner in which the course of Vinton was determined until it reached Twenty-first street, where it became a straight street for a great distance west.







Employes in the office of the city engineer are wont to become facetious in talking about crooked Vinton, and then delight in telling strangers that the street is crooked because it was laid out by a surveyor who had taken more than his share of stimulants. They say he made the lines for the street as he tried to walk down the now crooked Vinton, and that he could not steer his legs in a straight course. Consequently Vinton became, these facetious ones say, a twisted street, all because of the drunken surveyor's work on that day, many years ago.

All along its winding way Vinton is a busy street. It is traversed by the tracks of the street railway and has a commercial and social life that is all its own. In fact, it is perhaps the busiest street in the extreme south part of the city. While it wanders in and out among the shade trees that line its sides, offering nowhere an unobstructed view, its vistas are pleasing, and the stranger is kept wondering what lies just beyond the bend he can see ahead. He finds, when he has made the turn, the same short stretch of well-paved street, with homes or business blocks on either side. Dwellings along Vinton street are all comfortable, and some are pretentious. In some places it pretends even to exclusiveness, while in others its democracy is just a trifle emphasized. It has manufacturing enterprises and amusement projects along its way, a postoffice supplies its needs for communication with the outer world, while bakeries, laundries, groceries, dry goods stores and saloons complete the list of modern requirements for a self-contained community. Thus Omaha's one really crooked street has enough to make it independent of the rest of the world for a little while at least, if it were suddenly cut off from the rest of the city.

The story of Vinton's crooked way recalls to the minds of the older residents of Omaha the story of Isaac Hascall's boom project, which he launched in the middle seventies, and which had for its scene the vicinity of Vinton street. Judge Hascall was but one of many who dreamed of making a great business center somewhere in the vicinity of Vinton street. It was south of the railroad tracks that the Credit Foncier addition was laid out and exploited by George Francis Train, who conceived that the tide of growth might as easily be turned in that direction as in any other. The study of city growth has not yet developed any definite "law" along which urban expansion proceeds, and at the time the eccentric but enterprising Train undertook his dream of greatness for that part of Omaha which lies among the hills and hollows south of the ravine through which the Union Pacific and other roads found a way out of Omaha to the west no especial effort had been made in the way of developing the psychology of the city. Great conquerors and monarchs had built cities, their ipse dixit settling all the details. Alexander laid out in the marshes of the Nile delta a city that still stands; Peter the Great of Russia planted St. Petersburg in the swamps along the Neva, and similar instances may be multiplied. Baron Haussmann drew straight lines across the plat of Paris, and they became boulevards, and London and Berlin have been reformed in the same way. So why might not the development of Omaha be controlled by a master mind and its life be diverted into a channel chosen by George Francis Train, as well as to allow it to wander aimlessly over the landscape, as it eventually did? One of the vagaries of city growth is that Omaha would not follow along the thought of Train's plan, and Credit Foncier is still a dream unrealized. The section covered by the addition has been thickly built up, but it is not the principal section of the city.

So Isaac Hascall dreamed he might control city growth, and by anticipating some of the needs of the expanding life of Omaha direct its course into the part of town he predetermined was the one best suited for it.

In the early days of Omaha Isaac Hascall was considered one of the leading and richest citizens of this growing town. He was an eccentric character, but smart and progressive. He believed in a bigger and better Omaha, and stood by his convictions. He saw in his own mind the day when Omaha would be the great city of the middle west, and he decided to prepare for that time. In the vicinity of Vinton street he owned some land, which he thought was a good place for the center of the greater Omaha, of which he dreamed. He conceived the idea of turning that land into a thriving business district, and with that idea in mind he started to boom that part of Omaha in the vicinity of Vinton by erecting costly buildings there. On his property, between Thirteenth and Fourteenth streets and Castellar, he constructed a large brick building. He knew not what it was to be used for, but the idea of a large brick building pleased him, and he would put it up, despite protests of his friends.

A friend one day met him at the site of the building when the masons were laying the foundation. "The walls of the foundation were made three or four feet thick, and looked as though they were for a fortress. This friend, as he looked upon the foundation, asked Hascall what he intended to do with such a building. In reply, the boom agent replied: "O, I'll want this building large, for some day I'm going to chase the devil around these walls, and I'll want to give him a run for his money."

Another brick building was erected at 1925 South Thirteenth street. It still stands there, and now is the home of the Humane Horse Collar Manufacturing company. This building was, for many years after its construction, left vacant, and never, until very recently, brought in much rental. A few other buildings were put up by Hascall along Thirteenth, but they since have been torn down. None of them was used for any special purpose during the builder's boom days.

One of the queerest things done by Hascall, when he was making for a greater Omaha, was his construction of a stone fence running around two blocks of ground between Vinton and Castellar streets. The remains of this stone wall still stand on Castellar and Thirteenth streets. The land which this wall enclosed is now the site of the Western league base ball park. Hascall never gave any sensible reason why he built the wall. He told friends that it made things look nice and beautified the place.

Isaac Hascall's boom project, like a great many of its kind, burst and left its promoter a ruined man. His money was tied up in buildings that brought him no return on the investment. The buildings were not rented, and the business center of Omaha continued to remain several blocks north of Hascall's district.

Other sections of Omaha can tell similar tales of defeated ambition. Perhaps none other can show the monumental outlines in stone of "Hascall's Folly," as the work he left incomplete has been called, but the dreams of urban greatness cherished by founders has not frequently been realized. Isaac Hascall builded better than he knew in some ways, and laid the foundation for a substantial growth in the Vinton street region. Major Wilcox, who died in Council Bluffs a few years ago, poor, was another who saw in the future of that section great possibilities, and in preparing for Wilcox's additions to the town site he had in mind the growth of Omaha that was certain to follow the establishment of South Omaha, and could center in the Vinton street neighborhood. But Major Wilcox reckoned without his host and did not live to see the crooked street become the bustling thoroughfare he had in mind. But many who did buy lots from him are realizing now that all he had in mind was not mere imagination. The increase in use of property in that section of the city has brought corresponding increase in value, and the good fortune that missed Hascall, Wilcox and others has fallen to the lot of those who now own the lots these men laid out.

UPPER PICTURE, VINTON STREET'S FIRST TURN AT FIFTEENTH; SECOND PICTURE, AT THE INTERSECTION OF EIGHTEENTH; THIRD PICTURE, DOUBLE CURVE AT TWENTIETH AND VINTON; BOTTOM PICTURE, THE LAST TURN, AT TWENTY-FIRST STREET.

Explorer Baldwin Will Raise Vegetables While Drifting Across Arctic

NEW YORK, June 26.—Novel plans for wresting the final secrets of the Arctic regions have been made by Evelyn Briggs Baldwin. The venturesome explorer purposes on his next expedition to drift straight across the uncharted Arctic sea aboard an ice island several times the size of Central park. Established on his island, with portable houses, ponies, dogs, tons of whale meat and equipment, he will not care much what happens to the ship that brought him there. The ship may be crushed; it will not matter. During the four years of drifting from Bering Strait to the other side of the world, at the rate of two miles a day, the diet of canned food, sea shrimps, gulls, walrus and bear meat will naturally become monotonous. The members of the expedition will crave and need fresh vegetables. How can they be had in the frozen wastes of the far north? Mr. Baldwin plans to raise vegetables right on that ice island. He will have a garden patch, with artificial soil and artificial heat supplanting the rays of a six months' sun, and will raise onions and cabbages in close proximity to the North Pole. To farm on ice and plant crops in a section where the thermometer may suddenly drop 90 degrees below zero is a feat that none but a scientific agriculturist would attempt.

Mr. Baldwin intends to use captive and dirigible balloons as accessories to scientific observations, while a wireless telegraph outfit will keep him in touch with civilization through an intermediate station in Alaska. The dirigible balloons may furnish a means of escape to the explorers in case their island became untenable. The wireless system will inform the world what discoveries have been made, how the garden is getting along and when the party expects to reach Spitzbergen, while it will keep the explorers from becoming lonesome by providing them with the daily news of civilization. A searchlight for hunting bears during the six months' night, and a deep sea dredge with a bomb which will by explosion hurl marine specimens into a net, are other novel features. A cinematograph will take pictures of scenes and incidents of interest or importance.

"Starting in the late summer for Bering Strait," said Mr. Baldwin recently, "my plan is to have our expedition ship accompanied by two chartered vessels conveying a large quantity of logs or timber from the forests of Oregon and Alaska, casks filled with oil, foods, clothing and the extensive equipment necessary to set up a four years' colony on the ice. We will make directly for the edge of the pack ice to the northwest of Point Barrow, Alaska, and will tie up alongside the most promising ice floe. This will be in about latitude 73 north and longitude 165 west, or about 100 miles east of the point of besetment of the Jeannette, or 60 degrees east of the point where Nansen picked up the drift of De Long. This will give us a course northward right through the heart of more than 2,000,000 square miles of unexplored territory, stretching for 2,000 miles across the North Pole to the opposite edge of the pack ice between Greenland and Spitzbergen.

Our ship and convoys will soon be joined by one or more of the vessels composing the Pacific whaling fleet. These will bring to us great slabs of whale flesh and blubber, adding many tons to our supply of dog food. The whalers have no use for anything but the bone of the monsters they pursue, but to us the whale flesh will be of the utmost service. I shall arrange with the owners of the Pacific fleet to have the ships wintering on the coast of Alaska gather for us a cargo or two of whale meat. We shall find the whalers in the middle of August in the very region where we are going; they are hunting the great mammal to the edge of the ice pack.

"The ice floe, which is our first goal, is so extensive that were it split into a dozen equal parts one would be as large as Central park, and, being surrounded by other masses of ice of great size, it forms with its neighbors one continuous pack. The floes can never separate far from one another, but move forward as a group of natural barges floating across the great Arctic basin, parallel with the observed drift of the Jeannette and the Fram, to the opposite side of the Arctic sea. It is a four-year trip and we are absolutely assured of the course over which Nature will transport us free of charge. The ocean currents are slow, but certain.

"In distributing supplies on our ice island we will initiate our half dozen hardy Siberian ponies in sledging. Our stores of lumber, portable houses, stables and studios will be established on a firm foundation of ice twelve feet thick. Our vessel will soon be frozen in near the island colony, but there is no fear that it will be crushed, for it will ride high with the removal of coal and supplies, and will be internally strengthened with crossbeams from the log yard. After the convoys have gone the whaling ships will arrive with the cargoes of whale meat ordered in advance. I shall have trenches two and one-half feet deep cut into the ice to serve as a refrigerator for the whale flesh. By covering the flesh in the trenches with sea water, which quickly freezes, we will protect the meat from any impurities in the air, and can preserve it for any number of years. As a further protection against wild animals, dogs and gulls we will pile logs and casks above the trenches.

"The logs are furthermore useful as chaining posts for the dogs, upon which they may rest high and dry while dreaming their dog dreams, full of good food, and permitting the Arctic game to approach our settlement as targets for the marksmen of our party. But the most important use of the logs will be in the making of our polar garden. We must have fresh vegetables up there, both because they taste good and because they are a preventive of scurvy. Four years on an ice island without vegetables would be too much of a hardship. Not that we are vegetarians by any means. Bear meat and blubber taste fine for nine months in the year, but in the summer time salad and cucumbers are as desirable up north as down here. Why should not vegetables be raised at the pole, when there is six months of sunshine? Our logs will be the foundation for our garden. We will lay them close together and cover them with a layer of specially mixed earths and fertilizing material brought for this purpose. We will plant the vegetables in grooves chiselled in the logs or in the natural hollows formed by placing the logs side by side. By means of long tubes placed in the grooves or hollows we can warm the soil with a supply of artificially heated air, while screens, window glass and blankets will enable us to protect the vegetables against chilling winds that may arise. The methods is quite feasible; it is the application of hothouse gardening to Arctic conditions. I expect to raise cress, mustard, lettuce, onions, rhubarb and other anti-scorbutic plants. Wherever there is soil in the northmost land we find many species of flowers and grasses flourishing without artificial aid. Our seeds, of course, must be carefully preserved and enough taken to last four years, since our Arctic vegetables may not be able to reach the seed age. Likewise we must carefully gather up and save our garden soil at the end of each summer. As for fertilizers, we will obtain some from the surplus of marine life dredged from the bottom of the ocean.

"While dredging for marine specimens in summer electric light bulbs attached to the nets will lure to their doom hordes of strange sea animals, and many specimens of these will be stored away in empty oil casks. Animals which refuse to be coaxed will be killed with a deep sea bomb. In each numbered cask will be placed a flask containing data pertaining to its contents. Whatever happens to the expedition its scientific collections will therefore be safe and will some time float to civilization. The specimens themselves will be placed in bottles of diluted alcohol and the bottles packed in the casks with excelsior and waste paper.

"I do not expect to plant my colony more than ten or twelve miles from the edge of the ice pack. It makes no difference; the current will drive us on. By the first of September young ice of considerable thickness will be forming on the open water to the south, but we are sure to come back and proceed upon our northward journey. When winter has frozen the water along the coasts of all lands bordering on the Arctic ocean we may compare the ice pack to a great lid resting on the north polar basin, but consisting of many large sections, some of which, driven northward by the prevailing winds in the Bering Strait region, are finally caught by the strong ocean current which sweeps the east coast of Greenland and enters the north Atlantic. The middle sections of the great ice lid, being uninterrupted by shore lines, moves more rapidly than all other parts. It also makes more progress in winter than summer, because during the latter season the floes are less tightly packed, thereby allowing the carrying winds to shift them somewhat from a straight course. The course lines of the Jeannette and the Fram conform in a remarkable manner to the contour of the nearest coasts upon which the ice pack impinges, which is additional evidence that the floes can never drift widely apart.

"An illustration of this fact was given in the Jeannette expedition, when a small storehouse which was erected on a floe was blown out of sight, but after two years was found close at hand. Furthermore, the wreckage from the Jeannette was driven upon the ice floes to the southeast coast of Greenland. Had the members of this expedition been equipped according to my plan they could have safely

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