

# ***APPLETON IN THE 1870S***

## Wisconsin State Curriculum Alignment:

Social Studies B.8.1 – Interpret the past using a variety of sources, such as biographies, diaries, journals, artifacts, eyewitness interviews, and other primary source materials, and evaluate the credibility of sources used.

Social Studies B.8.4 – Compare and contrast changes in contemporary life with life in the past by looking at social, economic, political roles played by individuals and groups.

Social Studies A.4.5 – Use atlases, databases, grid systems, charts, graphs, and maps to gather information about the local community, Wisconsin, the United States, and the world.

Social Studies D.4.3 – Identify local goods and services that are part of the global economy and explain their use in Wisconsin.

English Language Arts A.4.3 – Read and discuss literary and nonliterary texts in order to understand the human experience.

- Identify and summarize main ideas and key points from literature, informational texts, and other print and non-print sources

English Language Arts E.4.3 – Create products appropriate to audience and purpose

- Create simple advertising messages and graphics appropriate for familiar media.

Houdini came to Appleton, Wisconsin in 1878. He arrived with his mother and brothers to join his father, Mayer Samuel Weiss, who had already emigrated from Hungary and had found a job as rabbi of Appleton's Jewish congregation. Houdini lived in Appleton for only four years; however, during that short time, much was happening in this little Midwestern town.

In 1856, workers completed construction of the Fox Canal. This canal allowed ships to travel the length of the Fox River from Green Bay to Lake Winnebago. Locks raised or lowered the water level so that boats could safely and easily pass over rapids or falls. The Canal increased travel and commerce (the transportation of goods to market) and opened the Fox Cities for growth.

Also in the mid 1850s, the lumbering industry became very big in Wisconsin. Lumberjacks worked tirelessly to harvest virgin lumber from Wisconsin forests. After processing at one of several new sawmills, the lumber was then transported via the Fox Canal and connecting waterways to destinations like Chicago where it was used to build homes and businesses. In fact, the loggers cut so much lumber that by 1890 all of the virgin pine in Wisconsin (except for that on the Menominee Reservation) was gone.

Finally, the 1850s and 1860s were a time when Wisconsin wheat farmers faced a crisis. Before these times, Wisconsin farmers grew a lot of wheat. However, as settlers moved farther west they discovered that the Plains states – like Nebraska, North and South Dakota – provided a better environment for growing wheat. As a result, wheat farming moved farther west and the grist mills used for grinding wheat into flour were left abandoned. With the resources of water power from the Fox River and wood from Wisconsin forests, the Fox Cities seemed

the perfect place for the papermaking industry to take root. Early paper factories converted grist mills to paper mills and established the Fox Valley as an important center for papermaking.

It was during these exciting times of growth that Houdini lived in Appleton. While here, he saw the development of the city's first water and sewer systems, the hydroelectric power station, and the opera house.

Read the following excerpt from the 1874 Appleton City Directory to get a sense of what Appleton was like during Houdini's time here.

In our review of the Appleton of today, we shall speak first of all of the water-power. The Fox River is almost *unparalleled* for the amount of its water-power within so short a distance, and so perfectly available . . .

This *immense* power is nature's great gift to Appleton . . . *capable* of yielding millions of dollars of yearly income . . . The growth of the city has been steady, rapid and healthful. [The water power now runs] two large wood pulp mills, three saw mills, four flouring and *grist mills*, two *foundries* and machine shops, three hub and spoke factories, two *tanneries*, one chair and bedstead factory, one pump factory, one *sash*, door and blind factory, one paper mill, one blast furnace, and two *planing mills* . . .

Such a thing as a vacant store is *scarcely* known . . . The retail trade of the city is very large . . . Here the farmer finds ready sale for everything that his farm produces, and in return can purchase anything his heart desires . . . There are more than one hundred places of business . . .

[Lawrence University's] over 400 boys and girls yearly receive *sound* and thorough instruction . . . Next in importance stands the Appleton Collegiate Institute . . . It possesses a fine school property, and, under a very *competent* faculty of teachers, is likely to be a success. The public school system is advancing towards perfection, although so rapid is the growth of the population that it is with difficulty that school room can be provided for all the scholars. Each ward has its school-house, and the course of instruction is very thoroughly graded. What Appleton now needs, to complete this system, is a high-school . . . [I]t is *probable* that, in a few years, Appleton will possess a high-school, equal in all *respects* to those of her sister cities.

In a moral and social point of view Appleton has always held a first rank. The first settlers were people of more than ordinary intelligence, and with *settled religious habits*, and they have been followed by a better class than usually falls to the lot of new places, so that today more people of *refinement* and culture can be found in Appleton than in any other city of equal size in the State. Like the great majority of Wisconsin towns the foreign element constitutes a large part of the population . . . The foreign population is at this time greater than the American; the total population being about 7,000 . . .

In 1860 the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad was *extended* to Appleton and Green Bay . . . In 1872 a railway was opened to Manitowoc, but the station being placed so far from the city, it has not as yet proved much benefit. The Milwaukee and Northern Railway, having laid its track to Menasha, *proposed* to extend the same to the water-power at Appleton, if the city would aid them. This aid the city willingly granted, but for some reason, the track has not yet been laid.

Here we must leave our brief *resume* of the past history and present growth of Appleton, leaving to some future historian to carry on the work and tell of the greater things to come. Perhaps he will look with *contempt* upon our *boastfulness* over the present things, but however great Appleton may become in the future, no one can view with contempt the scene that meets our eye this bright May morning.

- 1) After reading the excerpt from the 1874 City Directory, create a list of the features of the city about which the author writes.
  
- 2) According to the author, how does Appleton in the 1870s compare with other cities of the day? Cite evidence to support your answer.
  
- 3) Do you think this description of the city would encourage people to settle in Appleton? Why or why not?
  
- 4) Create a brochure promoting Appleton as a good place to live. Choose some of the qualities mentioned in the City Directory's description of the city. Draw pictures to illustrate these features and create a slogan that you think will draw people to Appleton. Your brochure can also include short descriptions of the city's features you are highlighting.
  
- 5) Does the City Directory's description mention any negative characteristics of the city of Appleton? Why do you suppose this is? Consider the description provided. Can you imagine any negatives that could accompany any of the positive features mentioned? If so, please list. The description says that a high school will be built soon. That means that without a high school, the education of most children stopped around the seventh grade.
  
- 6) Look at the 1874 Bird's Eye View map of Appleton. Can you find any of the industries, businesses, or educational institutions mentioned in the City Directory description? Can you see any other streets or

landmarks familiar to you today? Choose a block of Downtown College Ave. or another area of the city (such as your neighborhood) of which to draw a modern-day Bird's Eye View map. The 1874 map provided names of land owners or business owners, and it served as a record of the community. Can you imagine a public map showing that information today? Why or why not? Are you able to provide that information on your Bird's Eye View map drawing? If not, what does that say about our community? Is it a good or a bad thing?

**Key To: Bird's Eye View Map of Appleton, 1874.** Outagamie County Historical Society collection. (see map file on the AKA Houdini Site under Teacher's resources)

The following is a key written at the bottom of the map that is difficult to read in the online version. Where possible spelling and abbreviations have been preserved:

#### REFERENCES

1. Courthouse & Jail
2. Lawrence University
3. Appleton Collegiate Institute
4. Ward Schools
5. River Side Cemetary
6. C&N.W.R.R Depot
7. Waverly House        *Turner & Morgan*
8. Levake                *J. Johnston*
9. Lawerence            *E.H. Stone*

#### CHURCHES

10. St. Mary's R. C.        English
11. St. Joseph             German
12. Episcopal
13. Baptist
14. Methodist Episcopal
15. German Lutheran
16. "        Methodist
17. Congregational

#### MANUFACTORIES

- A. Appleton Iron Co.s Works
- B. Chair & Bedstead Manuf'y.        *Jas. F Atkinson*
- C. Foundry & Mach'e Shop        *Morgan, Merrill & Steele*
- D. Appleton Hub & Spoke Factory        *Marston & Beveridge*
- E. Saw & Shingle Mill Pine & Hard Lumber Wood        *Dorr & Steele*
- F. Flour Barrel, Stave & Heading Manufactory        *G.W. Spaulding & Co.*
- G. Western Wood Pulp Manuf'y Co.s Mill
- H. Ames Wood Pulp Manufacturing Co.s Mill
- I. Genesee Flouring Mill
- J. Saw, Shingle, Lath & Planning Mill        *W.&J. Wharton*
- K. Machine Shop
- L. Flouring Mill
- M. Flouring Mill
- N. Flouring Mill
- O. Door Sash & Blind Factory
  - i. Post Office
- P. Pump Factory        *T.W. Brown*

- R. Furniture, Sash Door & Blind Manuf'y.      *Brewster & Lederer*
- S. Paper Mill                                      *G.N. Richmond & Bros.*
- T. Mineral Spring                                *Harriman & Hyde*
- U. Hub & Spoke Factory
- V. Woolen Mill
- W. Tannery
- X. Hub & Spoke Factory

## Glossary

**Unparalleled** – Unequaled

**Immense** – Huge, enormous

**Capable** – Able to

**Grist mills** – Mills that grind grains into flour

**Foundries** – Factories where metal is melted and poured into molds

**Tanneries** – Leatherworking factories

**Sash** – The frame of a door or window

**Planing mills** – A mill where lumber is made smooth and level

**Scarcely** -- Hardly

**Sound** – Complete

**Competent** -- Capable

**Probable** -- Likely

**Respects** – Ways, manners

**Settled religious habits** – In other words, the settlers were religious people. They probably attended church or synagogue regularly.

**Refinement** – Good manners and good taste

**Extended** – Added on to, lengthened

**Proposed** – Suggested

**Resume** -- Summary

**Contempt** – An attitude that someone or something is inferior or worthless

**Boastfulness** – The act of being full of pride, bragging