

The Soiled Doves of East Grand Forks 1887–1915

Stephen G. Sylvester

EAST GRAND FORKS is located where the Red River of the North and the Red Lake River gently meet. It is a lovely spot and in its pristine state attracted William C. Nash, who in 1869 built the first white residence at the forks of the two rivers and settled down to wait for the flood of settlers he believed was certain to come to buy land. Nash held the contract for mail delivery along the Minnesota Stage Company route from Fort Abercrombie, Dakota Territory, to Fort Garry, Northwest Territory, and hired Gustav Loon and Nicholas Hoffman to help carry the mail along the lonely and oftentimes dangerous trail to Fort Garry. Loon and Hoffman built a cabin on the west side of the Red River at the site of present-day Grand Forks.¹

A trickle of newcomers settled at the forks during the decade following Nash's arrival, but there was no flood and development was painfully slow. A few buildings—a general store, a blacksmith shop, two primitive

saloons—joined Nash's cabin, but the first flush of real success did not come until 1879, when the Minneapolis, St. Paul, and Pacific Railroad linked nascent East Grand Forks to Crookston and points east. For two months, railroad crews with strong backs and raging thirsts filled to overflowing the saloons that comprised half the businesses of the town. Clinking of coins and glasses mingled with raucous sounds of singing, swearing, fighting—sweet sounds of success in a frontier town. But in February, 1880, the rails crossed the Red River and it was Grand Forks that began to prosper.²

Most cities and towns on the frontier experienced rapid early growth followed by a period of stagnation before they either died or entered relatively long periods of growth. East Grand Forks was different. It grew very slowly for the first ten years, then experienced periods of rapid growth followed by periods of rapid decline. Almost from the first, the success of the town depended on supply and demand—the supply of a

¹ R. I. Holcombe and William H. Bingham, eds., *Compendium of History and Biography of Polk County, Minnesota* (Minneapolis: W. H. Bingham & Co., 1916), 63; *Weekly Record* (East Grand Forks), Feb. 22, 1939, cover sec., p. 1, industrial sec., p. 1, 2, a special 60th anniversary edition.

² *Daily Herald* (Grand Forks), Oct. 23, Nov. 20, 1879, Jan. 22, 1880, all p. 1.

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transient labor force and the demand of the members of that force for commodities that only East Grand Forks offered—liquor and women of easy virtue.

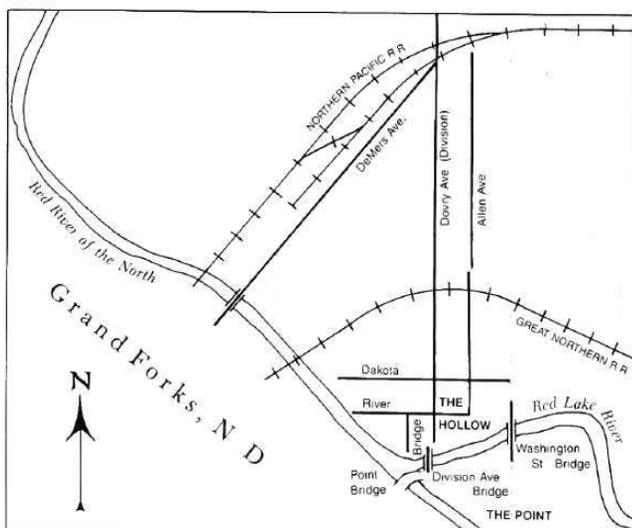
Despite the efforts of progressive reformers, prostitution was common in 19th-century America. Virtually every community of any size supported a contingent of women who peddled their charms, oftentimes with the tolerance, if not the outright approval, of city officials. Scaled-down versions of such red-light districts as Chicago's Levee, the Barbary Coast of San Francisco, and New York's Tenderloin existed in nearly every large and most smaller American cities.¹

Young communities of the trans-Mississippi west, frequently more than 80 percent male, attracted flocks of fallen angels. Where the women were from and where they eventually ended up is unclear. Census takers and city directory agents disguised "professional" women, if they included them at all, by listing them without occupations or as servants, seamstresses, and dressmakers.

Most towns outlawed prostitution, but few officials attempted effective enforcement. Most city fathers were content with occasional and selective arrests, fines, and containment. Tacit acceptance of humankind's oldest and most persistent social evil was the order of the day.²

DURING the decade between the arrival of the railroad and North Dakota statehood, East Grand Forks slumbered while Grand Forks grew and prospered. By 1885, Grand Forks had become the largest town in eastern Dakota Territory, boasting a brewery and 26 saloons, 15 of them on Third Street alone. In 1889 the *Courier* reported that East Grand Forks had paid

MAP of East Grand Forks, showing the tenderloin district of the Hollow and its environs



nearly \$5,000 in fines and liquor licenses to Polk County during the previous four years. But its Dakota counterpart, Grand Forks, had paid \$11,000 per year.³ With nothing extraordinary to offer, East Grand Forks could not compete with her sister across the Red until the high ideals and piety of prohibition emerged from the storm of protest politics over North Dakota statehood to provide a windfall that brought prosperity and a measure of fame to Minnesota's newest city.

Prohibition was popular in Dakota. Many Scandinavian and German farmers, themselves not averse to drink, supported prohibition because they did not want their hired hands to drink. Temperance societies distributed leaflets entitled *The White Ribbon* and held sunrise prayer meetings on election day. The Grand Forks *Herald*, with the largest circulation in the territory, supported both statehood and prohibition, and the Norwegian-language *Normanden* began as a temperance newspaper. In 1889, the constitution of the state of North Dakota was adopted. At the same time a separate prohibition amendment was approved. On July 1, 1890, Grand Forks went dry and East Grand Forks became a boomtown.⁴

According to the Grand Forks *Daily Plaindealer*, "even a casual observer could have noticed that something of a very important nature had transpired to seriously affect East Grand Forks. At an early hour DeMers Avenue was thronged with people—men—strangers to our citizens, many of them, and all of them imbued with the same idea—a 'snifter' before breakfast. A majority of the throng hailed from Grand Forks, where on the morning of July 1, love or money could not purchase a glass of liquor. During a greater part of the day and well into the night the throng kept coming and going, one at a time, and it is safe to say, 1,500 people were gathered together at different points along DeMers Avenue."⁵

By the next day, three Grand Forks saloon proprietors, W.T. (Billy) Franklin, Ed Anderson, and Sam Larson, had moved to East Grand Forks. Within ten days, East Grand Forks had 14 new saloons, most of which had been moved lock, stock, and barrel from the Dakota side of the river. This sudden influx of competitors distressed the saloon owners of East Grand Forks and

¹ Neil Larry Shumsky, "Tacit Acceptance: Respectable Americans and Segregated Prostitution, 1870–1910," *Journal of Social History* 19 (Summer, 1986): 665–679.

² For an interesting discussion of prostitution, see Elliott West, "Scarlet West: The Oldest Profession in the Trans-Mississippi West," *Montana: The Magazine of Western History* 31 (Spring, 1981): 16–27.

³ Elden Bladow, ed., *They Came to Stay* (Grand Forks: Privately published, 1974), 47–48.

⁴ Here and below, see *Daily Plaindealer* (Grand Forks), July 6, 1890, p. 6.



THE FRANKLIN SALOON, one of many opened in East Grand Forks soon after the passage of North Dakota's prohibition law

stimulated them to petition the City Council to refuse to issue additional liquor licenses. Sales were brisk, but established saloonkeepers wanted no additional competition. Their petitions were to no avail; by late August, five more saloons had been built. Saloon owners complained piteously. "Competition is ruining the business," said one disgruntled proprietor. "Two glasses of beer for a nickel now, next we'll be giving a free lunch with a beer on the side."⁷

Complaints notwithstanding, the establishments were profitable. And with them came soiled doves, attracted by clientele of the myriad saloons occupying the first three blocks of DeMers Avenue and the first block of the "Point," that wedge of land bordered on the north by the Red Lake River and on the west by the Red River of the North. Prohibition in North Dakota had sent a mixed blessing to the east side of the river.

The complaisant ladies who followed the saloons from Grand Forks to East Grand Forks in 1890 were hardly the first to grace that city. In 1879, railroad crews laying track from Crookston to East Grand Forks and on to St. Vincent drew significant numbers of prostitutes to East Grand Forks for the first time. But neither the crews nor the ladies of the evening could linger long. Rail construction moved on. Yet the railroad brought farmers and transient farm laborers—in numbers soon large enough to support saloons and houses of ill fame in both Grand Forks and East Grand Forks.

In 1887, when East Grand Forks incorporated, the

⁷ *Daily Plaindealer*, July 12, Oct. 3, 1890, both p. 4.

⁸ Charter of East Grand Forks, Vol. A, 1887–1891, p. 1, original in office of the city clerk.

⁹ *Daily Herald*, Aug. 20, 1888, p. 1. Bell McEwan left the area, according to the *Daily Herald*, Aug. 6, 1889, but she soon returned, to spend most of her time "sojourning with her sister in trade, Lou Livingston, at the Point."

first City Council made prostitution the subject of City Ordinance Number Four. Prostitution, houses of prostitution, and the frequenting of such establishments were declared illegal and fines set for each offense. Furthermore, prostitutes were to be legally ostracized: "It shall not be lawful for any woman of evil name or fame to ride with any male person in any buggy, carriage, or other vehicle in the city of East Grand Forks, or voluntarily to walk or appear in company with any male person upon the streets of said city, or enter any saloon, restaurant or eating house in said city."⁸

Ordinance Number Four did not define with unequivocal clarity how a woman of offensive reputation was to be recognized. The constabulary of East Grand Forks, however, understood nice distinctions and was able to swell the coffers of the city with a bounty of fines levied against madams, their employees, and the brothels to which they were restricted. For the madams and the girls the fines were ordinary business expense. No serious attempt was made to rid East Grand Forks of the followers of the world's oldest profession, either of the entrepreneurs or their patrons.

IN 1888, a fit of reform hit Grand Forks and the prostitutes of that city were sent packing, some by local officials and some by outraged citizens working under the cover of night. In August, the Grand Forks newspaper reported the following: "For a long time a house near the elevators at the M. & M. [*probably the Minneapolis and Northern*] yards has been occupied by Eva Faulk and Bell McEwan, two women, whom the neighbors assert have been keeping a house of ill repute. The police have tried again and again to have the women removed. No direct evidence of their guilt could be secured. But certain it is the place had become an eyesore to all in that neighborhood. Some practical means were necessary to remove the parties. Sunday morning between 2 and 3 o'clock, some persons at present unknown, went to the engine house on Fourth street and took out No. 4's hose cart. It has no gong and hence made but little noise. They wheeled it to a hydrant at the corner of Belmont and Fourth and ran the hose to the spotted house. Then the water was turned on and the place thoroughly flooded. The women found refuge in the garret. When the suspected fire was quenched and the work completed, the hose was left on the ground. A person passing at 4 o'clock and noticing how matters stood, notified Frank Whitbeck, superintendent of the water works. He at once repaired to the scene and with the assistance of firemen whom he aroused returned the hose to its proper place. It is not probable any great exertion will be made to discover the 'regulators.' Such women have no business to live in respectable localities—nor have men who patronize the houses."⁹

Across the river in East Grand Forks, the City Council accorded prostitution occasional earnest discussion and the expression of good, albeit unfulfilled, intentions. In October, 1887, for example, "A joint discussion between the Mayor and Aldermen relative to the social evil in this city took place, and a unanimous sentiment against the houses prevailed, and the council adjourned fully determined to enforce the ordinance against disorderly houses and houses of ill fame."¹⁰ The minutes of the meeting do not reveal how Council determination was to be implemented.

By 1889, there were houses of ill fame along the elbow of the Red Lake River on Division, Bridge, and Fourth avenues, comprising the tenderloin district, and those houses did a booming business. The good people of the two cities recognized the economic benefit of such flourishing enterprises and allowed them to operate. But children living on the Point attended school in East Grand Forks proper and passed the red-light district on their way to and from school. And those Grand Forks residents who wished to trade in East Grand Forks but had no interest in liquor or commercial love faced something of a Hobson's choice: cross the DeMers Avenue Bridge into the saloon district or cross the Point Bridge and the Division Avenue Bridge into the tenderloin district. Complaints, even petitions, were ignored.

The *Courier's* editor, Frank J. Duffy, reminded his readers that "Sometime ago . . . a great cry went up that the school in East Grand Forks could not be kept open any longer on account of the houses of ill-fame in the city. A petition, it was said, was circulated by a score or more of women who felt constrained to save their children, even at the expense of education, asking that the school be closed. With a flourish of trumpets, and a great hurrah, the board did order the school closed two days before the end of the term, and people held their breath waiting to see what the outcome would be when the new administration in municipal affairs took hold. With another flourish of trumpets and some more hurrahs, the aldermen who had professed so much solicitude for the dear school children and their overwrought mothers, ordered that ordinance No. 4 be enforced forthwith. Everybody almost in the city congratulated himself and his neighbor that the city was to be rid of the houses of ill fame. Even the inmates, we have been told, packed up their ward robes, furniture, and other belongings, in anticipation of the order being carried out. This was several months ago and the houses are still running full blast. The madams and their soiled doves were not disturbed, only notified to call around and pay a nominal fine into the city treasury. They have done so, and red-eyed masculine prodigality and wanton vice now hold high carnival as of yore."¹¹

There were several reasons the "dovecotes" were al-

lowed to operate. Soon after the railroads bridged the Red River at Moorhead, bonanza farms of up to 60,000 acres sprang up in the Red River Valley, and for two decades attracted hundreds of seasonal farm workers who joined the construction workers as pleasure seekers. The 9,200-acre Keystone farm at Euclid, for example, about ten miles east of East Grand Forks, was established by Charles Lockhart of Pittsburgh and Springer Harbaugh of St. Paul in the mid-1880s. The farm had several miles of graded roads, private drainage ditches, and 36 structures. In 1885, some 5,500 acres of grain were seeded.¹²

Loggers joined the thirsty and lonesome horde as the forests northeast of East Grand Forks were harvested. And the city itself was a fertile field for the enterprising madam. Citizens and civil servants of the community might deplore the presence of madams, their houses, and their girls, but the reality was that nearby seasonal workers could no longer conveniently slake their thirst and seek other relaxation in North Dakota and so joined those of Minnesota who could. It brought on a dilemma that affected both conscience and pocketbook, and East Grand Forks never of itself resolved the confusion. The best that could be done was to confine the activities of the madams and their charges to a single area of the city.

IN OCTOBER, 1889, Miss Chloe Mulnix bought the south half of Block 37 in Traill's Addition from land agents Solomon G. Comstock and Almond A. White. The south half of Block 37 and the northwest corner of Block 38 in Traill's Addition became infamous as "The Hollow," the tenderloin district of East Grand Forks that children passed on their way to and from school until the Division Avenue Bridge was replaced in 1903 by the Washington Street Bridge, two blocks east of the Hollow. The boundaries of the Hollow were Dakota Street on the north, Dovry Avenue on the west, Allen Avenue on the east, and River Street on the south, except for one very large bordello on the southeast corner of Dovry and River.¹³

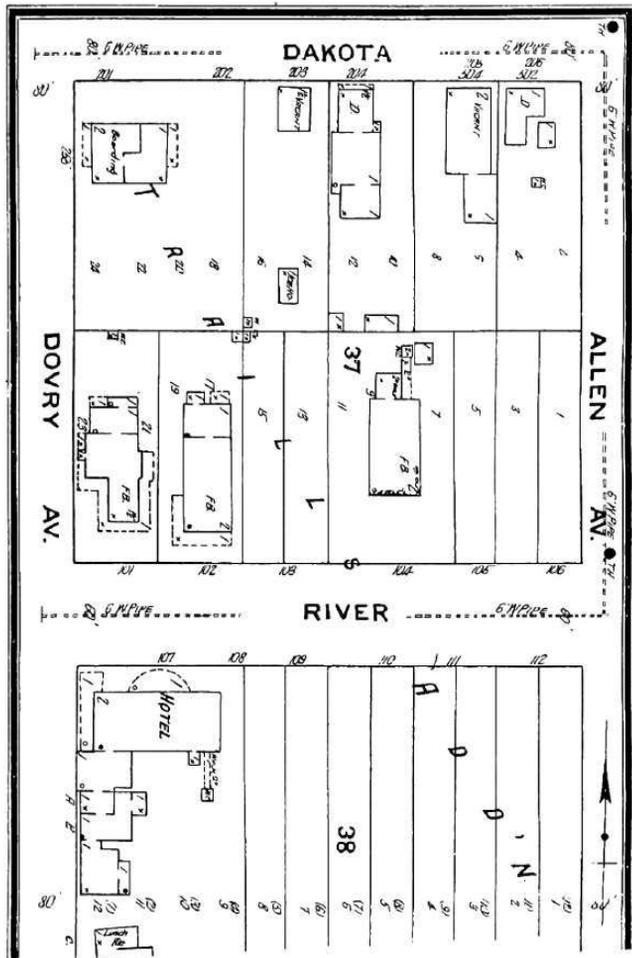
Working girls were not allowed on the streets of East Grand Forks, and their business was strictly confined to the Hollow. Contrary to popular belief, prostitutes were not allowed to solicit in the saloons nor on the streets of East Grand Forks. Women were rarely

¹⁰ Charter of East Grand Forks, Vol. A. 1887-1891, p. 28-29.

¹¹ Quoted in *Daily Herald*, July 5, 1889, p. 4.

¹² Stanley N. Murray, *The Valley Comes of Age* (Fargo: North Dakota Institute for Regional Studies, 1967), 135-136.

¹³ Polk County Deed Records, Book 43, p. 14, in Court-house, Crookston; Sanborn Map Co., *East Grand Forks, Polk County, Minnesota, June, 1904* (New York, 1904), plate 5, map library, Minnesota Historical Society (MHS).



THE 1909 plat shows the proliferation of female boarding establishments in the Hollow.

allowed in the saloons, although, if properly escorted, women were welcome to enter and take refreshment in a reserved room through the saloon's separate "Family Entrance." Saloon owner "Dominican Dan" Sullivan, so-called because of his Prince Albert coat, clerical collar, and handsome face, invited the ladies of East Grand Forks to inspect his new saloon, the palatial Council, but on its first Wednesday afternoon only between the hours of one and four.¹⁴ The Council was among the saloons destroyed in an 1898 fire; it was rebuilt the next year as the New Council and was every bit as fancy and beguiling as its predecessor. The principal interests of confirmed saloon patrons were two—drinking and gambling. Patrons seeking other consolation were directed to the Hollow. Every bartender and hack driver in town knew where that was.

¹⁴ *Daily Plaindealer*, June 29, 1891, p. 4.

¹⁵ *Polk County Journal* (Crookston), Jan. 23, 1896, p. 1; Polk County Deed Records, Book 43, p. 140.

Madam Mulnix was discreet. Only once during a career that lasted at least ten years did she face a judge in court, a district judge in Crookston who slapped her with a \$100 fine and suspended a 60-day jail sentence. Hers was the first house in the Hollow and she ran it successfully. By 1892, she had added several lots to her real estate holdings. That year she sold two lots to Anna McFarland and bought 12 lots across River Street in Block 38. Stephen Parkhurst, the first attorney to open a practice in East Grand Forks and the man whom Grand Forks *Herald* editor George Winship had once touted as being responsible for the first boom in the city, held the mortgage. Sheriff John S. Dwyer owned lot 2 of Block 37. His lot was not occupied by a house of ill fame, but it was in the neighborhood. The sheriff made no effort to run his neighbors out of business.¹⁵

Chloe Mulnix made good use of the property pur-

AN ADVERTISEMENT for the New Council, built to replace the old one that burned in 1898

A Upritable Palace Pride of the West

1898

The New Council

Complete in all its Appointments

WE RESPECTFULLY SOLICIT
THE
FAMILY
TRADE
AND EXERCISE THE UTMOST
PROMPTNESS IN DELIVERY

Telephone 52

DAN SULLIVAN, PROP.

East Grand Forks, Minn.

16	Marianne Noble	20	F	W	Ill			Head raising
	Wm Davis	20	F	W	Ill			Domestic
	William Larch	19	F	W	Ill			Domestic
	Gordon Isles	21	F	W	Ill			Dressmaker
	Helenas plate	32	F	W	Ill			Housekeep.
	Albion Marcus	42	F	W	Ill			Laund.
17	Grace Leonine	20	F	W	Ill			Housekeeper
	Henry Myrtle	22	F	W	Ill			Musical teacher
	Lary Klaggie	17	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	Biederman, Bernie	24	F	W	Ill			Housekeep.
	Heli. Ida	28	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	Hall Jennie	38	F	W	Ill			Boarding house
18	Wm. J. L. Lay, Jr.	26	F	B	Ill			Laund.
	Corce Emma	22	F	W	Ill			Dressing
	Professor Rubin	20	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	Thompson Leticia	27	F	W	Ill			Dressmaker
	Lambert Jennie	35	F	W	Ill			Laund.
19	Livingston Luc	37	F	W	Ill			Boarding
	Alatkinson Myrtle	12	F	W	Ill			Dressing
	Archer Jennie	20	F	W	Ill			Dressmaker
	Archer Jennie	22	F	W	Ill			Dressmaker
	Harris Bertie	21	F	W	Ill			Dressmaker
	Carroll Jennie	25	F	W	Ill			Laund.
20	McDonald Jennie	32	F	W	Ill			Housekeeper
	McConnell Mary	21	F	W	Ill			Nurse
	Reister Mary	23	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	Blair Bertie	23	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	King Lizzie	22	F	W	Ill			Laund.
	Blair Harry E	41	F	W	Ill			Laund.
21	Geigle George	20	F	W	Ill			Boarding

A NUMBER of names of East Grand Forks demimondes grace this page from the 1895 Minnesota state census.

chased with Parkhurst's help. She built a house so large that it appeared on the Sanborn map of 1909 as a hotel. (Neither the Sanborn maps nor annual city directories included brothels on the lists of business concerns of the cities, and the Mulnix Hotel did not appear in any city directory.) Sometime during the 1890s, the city directories of East Grand Forks began to list the names, but not the occupations, of soiled doves whom the city directory agents managed to find at home. The arrest records of East Grand Forks reveal that more doves were missed than counted, but significant numbers were listed. The absence of an occupation coupled with an address in the Hollow identified a "working girl." The houses in the Hollow were listed as boarding-houses, but only women and one male porter occupied each one. In 1896, Madam Chloe's house was credited with five boarders, none of whom was arrested for prostitution that year. That number was certainly well below the capacity of the place. City directories between 1895 and 1905 listed 30 working girls on the average. The criminal docket of East Grand Forks for that period contains the names of about 90 women each year who were arrested for prostitution. Like the patrons the houses served, their occupants were a transient population.¹⁶

Mulnix ran her house for many years. She encouraged competition as well. She sold lots to two of the most notorious courtesans of East Grand Forks, Carrie Biederman and Lou Livingston, both of whom built bordellos there. About 1897, Chloe Mulnix married an unemployed liveryman named John W. Spargur; he opened a livery on DeMers, and the couple lived on Fifth Street for several years. In 1899, she leased 40 feet of her riverfront property to the Grand Forks Lumber Company for use as a dock. All she asked in compensation was the princely sum of one dollar. Her boarding-house was but a few yards from the dock.

Chloe Mulnix Spargur was the most successful, if not the most notorious, of East Grand Forks madams. In 1908 she was listed on property tax rolls as the seventh largest property owner in East Grand Forks, behind the Grand Forks Lumber Company, the city's two banks, the Grand Forks Gas and Electric Company, Arneson Mercantile Company, and the East Grand

¹⁶ Information here and in the following paragraph was gleaned from pertinent land records, insurance maps, court records, and city directories. While brothels *per se* were not listed, the Sanborn maps marked "F. B." for female boarding, a common euphemism for houses of ill fame.

Forks Transportation Company. Two other madams, Grace Noble and Carrie Watson, made the top 20 that year.¹⁷ Ultimately, the Spargurs left East Grand Forks for places unknown, and some of their property was sold in the 1930s for taxes. The Hollow was finally emptied of excitement by social pressure and state law.

AS EAST GRAND FORKS came into its own, Grand Forks supplied both patrons and girls. According to a comparison of the two cities in 1903, Grand Forks suffered 86 arrests for houses of prostitution in 1889, none in 1900, despite a 54 percent increase in population. Most of the demimonde residing in Grand Forks had moved across the river with the saloons in 1890. Occasionally, however, the underside of Grand Forks was exposed: "Yesterday morning a house of ill-fame in Grand Forks, presided over by Jennie Hill, colored, was 'pulled' by the police, and as a result two women and sixteen men, occupying four beds, were gathered in. Had this little affair happened in East Grand Forks the whole country would have been advised, but as it occurred in Prohibition Grand Forks but passing notice is given. Ring down the curtain."¹⁸

Frank Duffy, the loquacious editor of the *Courier*, may have been correct. Had the arrest occurred in East

¹⁷ *Polk County Journal*, Jan. 9, 1908, p. 5; Polk County Deed Records, Book 43, p. 140.

¹⁸ *Daily Herald*, Mar. 22, 1903, p. 3; *Courier*, Feb. 5, 1892, p. 4.

¹⁹ *Courier*, Oct. 7, 1892, p. 4.

Grand Forks, the *Herald* would have had a field day with the story. But there were few raids in East Grand Forks and few arrests. Discretion was the rule, and the occasional bad actor earned the disgust of the city's selective conscience in the *Courier*: "Annie Wilson, who conducts a tough joint near the Point bridge, was arrested Tuesday night for making a disturbance on the street. When arraigned Wednesday morning she plead [sic] 'guilty,' and was fined \$11.00. The authorities should make use of more effectual means than the imposition of fines to put a stop to public exhibitions by these depraved madams. And when it is known that these same fallen creatures have received courtesies at the hands of some of the officers of the city, it is high time for common decency, if any exists in the city, to call them down, not by the imposition of a beggarly fine, but by the exercise of such heroic measures as will remove them entirely from the city."¹⁹

Editor Duffy rarely called for such drastic action and none was taken. Instead, the madams and their charges were assessed at the beginning of each month, the fines swelling the city's coffers significantly. Duffy, as usual, commented at some length: "Naturally, the biggest source of revenue is from liquor licenses. During the year 38 liquor licenses were issued at \$500 each, giving a grand total from this source alone of \$19,000. It will be observed that so far no direct city tax levy has been made, at least none from which any revenue has been received. . . . The item of \$2,575.71 received from fines includes not only the money received from

A PAGE from the criminal docket for 1895 details the disposition of one bordello keeper's case.

STATE OF MINNESOTA, ¹		IN MUNICIPAL COURT, ³¹	
COUNTY OF POLK		CITY OF EAST GRAND FORKS.	
THE STATE OF MINNESOTA, Plaintiff,		Municipal Judge.	
<i>Manu L. Livingston</i>		<i>nil.</i>	
		<i>nil.</i>	
OFFICERS' FEES.		Attorney for Plaintiff.	
<i>H. Dingley</i>		Attorney for Defendant.	
1.50			
COURT FEES			
Issuing Warrant and Filing,	1.00		
Issuing Subpoenas and Filing,			
Oaths to Witnesses,	.95		
Adjournments,			
Entering Judgment,	3.50		
Affidavits,	3.50		
Taking and Approving Recognizance,	2.50		

Complaint filed and sworn to before me this 10th day of Sept 1895, Officer Dingley charging Deft with the offence of keeping a Bordello House. Warrant issued to Officer Dingley this 10th day of Sept 1895. Warrant returned this 10th day of Sept 1895. Executed by said officer. Deft in court in court. Complaint read to Deft. Deft pleads guilty. Whereupon therefor it is ordered and adjudged that the Deft do pay a fine of \$15.00 and that each of this action be sent at \$1.75 or to be committed to the city jail. Deft paid fine over and was dis charged. Deft in of few Court this 10th day of Sept. A.D. 1895

D. A. Sullivan,
Municipal Judge
John Chambers
Clerk Municipal Court

the justices' courts for drunkenness, but also takes in the revenue received monthly from the houses of ill fame. Each month the madams are assessed fines ranging from \$10.25 to \$20.25, depending to a certain extent upon the amount of business done, as well as the financial condition of the city treasury. Each inmate every month is made to cough up either \$6.10 or \$10.25. From Pettibone's city directory we learn that the average number of sporting women in East Grand Forks is thirty-five. Fixing the fine for the odd months at \$10.25, and for the even months at \$6.10, the monthly average is \$8.18 per head, or \$286.30 per month, or \$3,435.60 per year. The directory notes the fact that there are seven madams, or landladies in the city. Their fines are \$10.25 and \$20.25, or a monthly average of \$15.25, which multiplied by seven gives the city a monthly revenue of \$106.50 and a yearly income of \$1,281, which added to the amount coughed up by the inmates makes a grand total of \$4,716.60 which the city of East Grand Forks should have realized during the year just closing from her houses of prostitution. And yet in view of the foregoing figures the city treasurer's statement shows only a total of \$2,575.71 collected during the year in the shape of fines from all sources. Now, here is food for reflection for the intelligent taxpayer."²⁰

WHATEVER reflections occupied the intelligent taxpayers of East Grand Forks had no effect on either collecting or reporting of fines for prostitution. The number of prostitutes in the city at any given time had little to do with the number required to pay dues in the form of fines. In 1896, for example, there were no fewer than six madams and 98 working girls in East Grand Forks.²¹ Had they all been working in the city throughout the year and had they all been fined at that year's rate of \$9.50 per working girl and \$29.50 per madam each month, the city treasury would have been enhanced by \$13,296—assuming the absolute honesty of the collecting officers.

From August through December, 1896, just over \$1,900 in fines for "frequenting a house of ill-fame" or "operating a house of ill-fame" were levied by Municipal Judge Timothy A. Sullivan. During that period, neither Chloe Mulnix nor Carrie Biederman were fined by Judge Sullivan, despite the fact that they were operating houses in the Hollow. Others, such as Blanche Wilson, who lived in Carrie's house, Dollie White, and Frankie Smith were fined every month. There should have been \$4,000 in fines collected and turned over to the city that year.

During 1899, Judge Sullivan's court collected \$2,348 in fines from 181 arrests for resorting to or frequenting a house of ill fame. Judge Sullivan levied fines ranging from \$2 to \$50 for 238 arrests for charges ranging from drunk and disorderly to bastardy and maim-

MUNICIPAL Judge
Timothy A. Sullivan



ing. Clearly, prostitution was an important source of income for East Grand Forks. But the city treasurer's report for that year listed \$1,765.28 for all fines from municipal court.²² Just how much money was siphoned off, and who did the siphoning are matters of conjecture. No official effort to verify the audit of the books was undertaken between 1889 and 1909.

The "intelligent taxpayers" were satisfied with a fiscal policy that supplied sufficient funds to maintain the streets and avenues of the city. The women who paid the fines were at first forbidden by city ordinance to travel in open carriages, but in 1894 D. P. R. Strong engineered an amendment to Section 5 of Ordinance Number 4 that gave those ladies freedom of the streets between nine o'clock P.M. and two o'clock A.M. Duffy wrote that "This is evidently intended to give 'every dog his day and every cat her night.' The ordinance passed." Arrests for violations of the ordinance were rare, but they happened. The unfortunate Frankie Smith, a regular in Judge Sullivan's court, paid a five-dollar fine and costs in July, 1896, for "riding on the streets of East Grand Forks in a buggy with a male person." The male person was neither identified nor fined.²³

Although it is impossible to discover the precise number of demimondes working at any given time in East Grand Forks, examinations of city directories and criminal dockets reveal surprising consistency. In 1896,

²⁰ *Courier*, Mar. 31, 1893, p. 4.

²¹ Here and below, see Criminal Docket of East Grand Forks, Vol. 1, D-O, located in the Antique Lounge, East Grand Forks.

²² Criminal Docket, Municipal Court of East Grand Forks, Feb. 12 to Dec. 31, 1899; East Grand Forks, Council Minutes, "Proceedings of all Meetings," Jan., 1900, to May, 1910, p. 185.

²³ *Courier*, June 15, 1894, p. 5; Criminal Docket, Municipal Court of East Grand Forks, July 6, 1896, p. 275.

there were six madams, 98 doves; in 1899, eight madams, 87 doves; in 1903, an indeterminate number of madams, 70 doves; in 1908, 84 doves. Until Hugh Dunlevy's election as mayor in 1908, the women were allowed to operate with only occasional opposition from county officials. By then, the number of railroad construction workers had dwindled to almost nothing. James J. Hill had long since pushed his Northern Pacific to the West Coast, and major construction was complete. Bonanza farms had begun to break up in the mid-1890s and the number of transient farm workers had declined considerably.

THE DESIRE FOR REFORM, coupled with a sudden decline in the available patrons for the Hollow occasioned by the closing in 1909 of the Grand Forks Lumber Company, the largest business in East Grand Forks, spelled the beginning of the end of large-scale prostitution in the city. The turn of the century signalled a national trend toward social reform. Following the failure of Populism, a farm-labor coalition led by William Jennings Bryan and dedicated to gaining political power over corrupt "interests" in the East, the Progressive movement concentrated on social legislation. Early accomplishments included pure food and drug laws, dismantled trusts, and federal laws regulating child and female labor. Prostitution, alcohol, and gambling became the targets of dedicated progressive reformers. Their efforts culminated in the passage of the Eight-

²⁴ *Valley View* (East Grand Forks), July 3, 1903, p. 4; *Polk County Journal*, Mar. 7, 1907, p. 3.

eenth Amendment and the Volstead Act, which mandated national prohibition of alcohol.

During the first decade of the 20th century, the climate was right for attacks on the venerable institutions of East Grand Forks. The "Knockers Club" of East Grand Forks, a loose reform group led by City Hall janitor Bobby Mitchell, began working in 1903 by helping a grand jury gain indictments against saloon owners who ignored early saloon closing statutes and against madams who insisted on keeping their houses of ill fame open. Fines grew larger and were levied more frequently, but had little effect. In March, 1907, Clara Anderson was arrested and charged with running a disorderly house. Clara was short of funds and could not pay the \$25 fine levied by Municipal Judge Sullivan. In the past, the understanding judge had simply paroled a prostitute who could not pay her fine, so she could raise the money in her own way. This time, the hapless Clara was sent to jail in Crookston for 30 days. According to the *Polk County Journal*, the Hollow got a scare.²⁴

In January, 1908, Carrie Barney's place, known as "225," burned. The residents lost all their belongings, and the building, valued at \$13,500, was a total loss. According to the *Polk County Journal*, "The original building was erected in 1889 and has been enlarged from time to time until it was perhaps the largest frame building in the city. The resort was conducted for a time by the notorious Lou Livingston and has been the scene during its history of numerous orgies and escapades." Property records show that Chloe Mulnix Spargur owned the property, having retrieved it in 1897

THE 1911 police force of East Grand Forks, with longtime officer Hugh Quigley seated front right



after Lou Livingston lost it to taxes.²⁵ Its loss was a major blow to the Hollow.

Later that month, Lizzie Ray and Flora Jones were arrested in Harry Hutchin's saloon and charged with keeping a disorderly house there. The \$80 fine against Lizzie indicated the intent of Mayor Dunlevy and the City Council to have the ordinances against prostitution enforced, at least outside the Hollow. In May, Nellie Roger's place in the Frederick's Block was raided and she was sentenced to 60 days in jail. Nellie moved her house two miles out of town, operating beyond the reach of East Grand Forks authorities until her house burned in 1914. Joel Jarvis almost lost his liquor license for not being of the proper moral character to run a saloon. He had knowingly allowed a portion of his building to be used for immoral purposes. Jarvis had to surrender control of the top floor of his building to the authorities in order to keep his license. The 84 or so soiled doves of East Grand Forks in 1908 were put on notice to be discreet or be run out of town.²⁶ Raids on houses outside the Hollow were the extent of Mayor Dunlevy's actions.

Mayor John J. O'Leary accelerated the fining and the accounting, but left the Hollow unmolested. It finally took a state law to close down the houses there. In 1913, the Minnesota legislature passed the Wallace/Fosseen Abatement Act. The act ordered all houses of ill fame to be closed and left vacant for one year, whether or not the owner occupied the house, and imposed a fine of \$300 each, to be collected as a tax. The Sanborn map of 1914 shows all six of the houses in the Hollow as either vacant or gone.²⁷ The progressive forces had won the first round.

For almost three decades, fines levied against the madams and soiled doves of East Grand Forks had paved the city streets from which those ladies were banned. Although the oldest profession was not an honored profession in East Grand Forks, it was tolerated as long as the demand was great enough and the need for revenue pressing enough. After the railroads were completed, the men who built them moved on. The loggers who had once flocked to East Grand Forks from the forests to the east followed the mills west. The bonanza farms that had attracted hundreds of single men were divided to become small family farms. Transient laborers were no longer needed. The demand for commercial love was gone and with it such notorious ladies as Bell McEwan, Lou Livingston, and Dollie White. Where they went remains a mystery. Prostitution, once the third largest business in the city behind liquor and lumber, never again gained a foothold. The citizens of East Grand Forks found other ways to finance the avenues that were once "For Ladies Only."

²⁵ *Polk County Journal*, Jan. 23, 1908, p. 3; Polk County Deed Records, Book 43, p. 22, 229.

²⁶ *Polk County Journal*, Jan. 30, 1908, p. 6; *Daily Herald*, May 5, 6, 1908, both p. 3; *Weekly Record*, July 17, 1914, p. 5.

²⁷ Minnesota, *Laws*, 1913, p. 815–820; *Weekly Record*, Jan. 15, 1915, p. 1; Sanborn Map Co., *East Grand Forks* (New York, 1914), p. 5.

THE ILLUSTRATIONS on p. 293, 295, and 299 are from *A Meeting of the Reds: East Grand Forks, 1887–1987*, originals courtesy of Warren Stradell of *The Exponent*; the photograph on p. 298 is from W. L. Dudley, *The City of East Grand Forks . . . Illustrated* (1901), 13; the map on p. 292 is by Alan Ominsky.



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