

## **The History of the Three Wilsey Buildings**

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, April 24, 1913**

### **FIREMEN DO GOOD WORK**

#### **Save Wilsey Building from Destruction**

#### **FIRE STARTED BY GASOLINE**

#### **In the Dyeing and Cleaning Establishment**

#### **Mr Wilsey will Tear Ruins Down and Start New Structure on the Site**

On Monday evening, about six o'clock, just as Manager Seymour of the Paterson Dyeing and Cleaning Co., in the Wilsey Building on the Plaza, was about to go home, a customer came in with a suit he wanted cleaned and pressed at once. Mr. Seymour got out his gasoline and cleaned the coat. With his hands covered with gasoline, he struck a match to light the gas. At once flames covered his hand and set fire to his shirt sleeve. A piece of the burning cloth fell in the gasoline which immediately scattered flames all over the room. He tried to beat them out, but failed and then ran to the door and called for help.

The alarm was sent in and the Department responded quickly. When they got there the dyeing place was burning fiercely and the flames were spreading both ways. Soon four streams of water were pouring on the flames which were quickly got in control. But in the mean time Darling's upholstery establishment next door south, was completely filled with smoke and on fire in the rear. Then there followed a back draft that blew out the two front windows and sent a shower of glass over the firemen in front. Charles Pearsall was cut in the cheek and in several places on his body, as were James Pearsall and John Heerma. One of the pieces of glass that struck Heerma between the shoulder-blades cut through several thicknesses of cloth and made a wound an inch deep.

The work of the Department was admirable. The fire was a dangerous one, but the boys kept it confined to the one-story part of the building, and used the water with such discretion that no unnecessary damage was done that way. So pleased with their work was the real estate firm of S. S. Walstrum-Gordon & Forsman, which occupies the front of the building, that it sent a check for \$25 to the Department with a commendatory letter. Freeholder Watson, whose law office is in the building, also sent his check to the Department.

Seymour did not lose heavily, as most of the garments left with him were in Paterson. His fixtures were inexpensive. He had no insurance. Biggerman's fish market, next door to the north, was flooded, but as Theodore says, "You can't drown a fish," and he is "doing business at the old stand." Darling is the heaviest loser. He had a large stock to which damage was done by water. He carried \$600 insurance.

The building was insured by Walstrum-Gordon & Forman and they have already made a satisfactory adjustment with Mr. Wilsey for \$2,500. He will not rebuild, but after arranging temporary quarters for Darling, Seymour and Biggerman in the stables south of his building, will tear down all the one-story part and erect a concrete and stucco building there, of the same general style as the Osmun Building, and which he expects will be a portion of the three-story building he hopes to erect in place of the present structure on the corner of the Plaza and Ridgewood Avenue.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, May 8, 1913**

-The tail end of the Wilsey Building is being moved northward and very soon the foundations will be laid for the fine structure that is to take its place.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, August 28, 1913**

-The new Wilsey Building is beginning to show up impressively. When the big structure is completed to Ridgewood Avenue it should make the Erie people get busy with that new station.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, September 11, 1913**

-Costa, the Fruiterer, has leased until May 1st the store just vacated by Herington and will move into it soon. He will thus retain quarters on Ridgewood Avenue, while the old Wilsey Building is being moved and the new one built. After that he will have a handsome new store in the new building.

-Darling, the Upholsterer, is about to move into the quarters now occupied by Costa, who takes the Herington store. When the old Wilsey Building is being moved, he will move with it.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, October 23, 1913**

-The difficult work of moving the Wilsey Building from Ridgewood Avenue north has begun and the various tenants are locating in the new half of the handsome new building. Dowling and Barnett will remain in the building that is being moved.

**The Ridgewood News, Friday, October 31, 1913**

-The Wilsey building corner of Ridgewood avenue and Broad street, is on its journey to the other end of the new building in order to build up the corner plot.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, January 1, 1914**

-A few more days of this sort of weather and the Wilsey Building will be entirely roofed. Progress on the building has been very rapid.

**The Bergen County Democrat, Friday, March 4, 1914**

**RIDGEWOOD.**

The telegraph and telephone offices were removed this week from the First National Bank building, Ridgewood avenue, to the Wilsey building, North Broad street.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, March 5, 1914**

-S. S. Walstrum-Gordon & Forman have moved into their new offices in the Wilsey Building and if there is a handsomer suite of rooms devoted to the real estate business in this County, we have yet to see them.

-The Western Union Telegraph Office is now located in the Wilsey Building, with Clarence Pfeifer still in charge, pending the return of Frank W. Milliken, who is convalescing after his wrestle with the mumps.

**The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, April 9, 1914**

[Editorial]

***WHAT RIDGEWOOD OWES  
TO WALTER W. WILSEY***

For years Ridgewood has been growling about the conditions around the Erie station, the station itself, the switches, the freight cars that stand along the Plaza,—well, why particularize? We all know what unsightly conditions prevailed and do prevail. But within a year or so, those conditions have seemed vastly worse than ever in contrast to the handsome buildings that have been built.

Ridgewood has been greatly improved by the erection of the Osmun Building, the Play House and the Wilsey Building. Nothing, we believe, has ever been done in a public way of so much real advantage to this Village as the improvements that have been made on Wilsey Square and the Plaza. And they are the work of one young man, Walter W. Wilsey.

Ridgewood owes a good deal to him, for all that he has done in the way of real estate development has proved to be good for the Village as well as good for him. He has had faith in the future of Ridgewood and has given of his faith by his works. The results are seen today, in the splendid showing made right in the face of a dirty old station and a lot of equally dirty freight cars that separate the real beauty of the buildings on Wilsey Square from the real attractiveness of the big buildings on the Plaza.

It is high time that Ridgewood realized what one of its citizens has done and is trying to do for Ridgewood. We have heard lots of criticism of Walter W. Wilsey. It has come principally from the mossbacks, who have objected every time he has proposed a real improvement, for which he, usually, has offered to pay from fifty to seventy-five per cent. of the cost. These are men who cannot understand how another man can be influenced by other than dollar-and-cent considerations. Mr. Wilsey has been criticized by these mossbacks.

Now for a little real history. In 1899—fifteen years ago—Mrs. Anna M. Wilsey came to Ridgewood and rented a house on West Franklin Avenue from E. A. Walton. Her son, Walter, had just graduated from the New York Law School. He went into the law office of James B. Ludlow and worked hard, commuting between New York and Ridgewood. Pretty soon he met Miss Cordelia O. Bedell and in time married her. Then he began to take serious consideration for the morrow.

He learned that his employer, James B. Ludlow, was doing well in Yonkers real estate. He investigated Ridgewood real estate. The result was that he undertook to handle the property of Mrs. Wilsey's uncle, George Cantrell, in what is now known as Kathawood Park. He organized the Ridgewood Park Co. and bought the Cantrell holdings. This was in 1903. In 1905 he decided to devote his entire attention to Ridgewood real estate.

In 1905 Mr. Wilsey thought that the building of the McAdoo tunnels and the improvements promised on Godwin Avenue and the building of the Monroe Street School warranted continuation in the development enterprise, started in Kathawood Park.

The result here justified Mr. Wilsey's judgement. He found many purchasers for Kathawood Park properties and as fast as he sold them he invested in property near the Erie Station. Earlier than this, Herbert Parsons, the well-known Republican politician of New York, had put \$500 into Mr. Wilsey's projects as a "mere flyer." Now he was convinced that his young friend had the "real stuff," and he increased his holdings by many thousands of dollars, enabling Mr. Wilsey to buy extensively in Upper Ridgewood.

But while putting down miles of pavement, curb and sidewalk in Upper Ridgewood, Mr. Wilsey has been equally busy with his property around the Station. He had been one of the most energetic of our citizens in insisting that Erie should meet the conditions and give Ridgewood a decent station; but the fact that Erie would do nothing did not deter him from doing what he could to make the entrance to Ridgewood at least decent. He believed that Erie would in time meet the situation.

It has been this faith in the good sense of the people that has led Walter W. Wilsey to accomplish what he has. He believes that the people want the best and that they will back the man who wants to give them the best.

Walter W. Wilsey has set the pace for Ridgewood. What he has done has been in the way of shrewd business. He does not pose as a philanthropist. He wants to make at least 6 per cent. on all his investments. But he believes in Ridgewood, and his works prove his faith.

-The formal opening of the fine rooms of the Woman's Club in the Wilsey Building next Wednesday evening, April 15th, promises to be an affair of more than ordinary interest from a social standpoint.

-Billy Moore is rather proud of the copper weather vane that he designed and placed on the Wilsey Building; but his pride got a jolt yesterday when a wise citizen, at the Erie station, the wind being from the south said, "Moore, the feller that put up that vane got the letters backward, see?" "Yes, I see," growled Billy. "S'pose you walk down to the Bank and then look at the vane." "O-o-h, that's so," said the wise citizen.

#### **The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, May 14, 1914**

-The Ridgewood Park Company (which will hereafter be known as The Wilsey Realty Company) is moving today from the Osmun Building on Wilsey Square to their new offices on the second floor of the Wilsey Building.

#### **The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, June 15, 1916**

-To keep up with the improvements around the new station, W. W. Wilsey has awarded to Peter Wentink, the Chestnut Street jeweler, the contract to install in the big clock in the Wilsey Building a standard tower movement, which will be a convenience and also Ridgewood's first town clock.

#### **The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, March 22, 1917**

-Walter W. Wilsey is putting up a neat little brick building adjoining the Wilsey Building, which will give him attractive first-floor office facilities.

#### **The Ridgewood Herald, Thursday, July 5, 1917**

-Bogert & Harris, the attorneys, have moved their offices to the Wilsey Building, occupying the suite formerly used by Mr. Wilsey, who is now located in his beautiful little model building on the North Plaza.

[The brick building between the first and second Wilsey Buildings]

Data compiled by Village Historian Joseph Suplicki, 2020