

Durkee's Survey

Should any real estate dealer actuated by personal motive or business aggressiveness ever attempt to purchase the river common and divide it up into building lots for sale, he would at once find himself the object of the scorn and anger of every local resident with any civic pride. We all know that such a sale could not be arranged despite any such effort. The city owns the river common and will not part with it for any consideration. It is one of the prettiest fresh-air spots in Wyoming Valley. However, despite the impossibility of the purchase of the land at this time, there was once a time when the river common was divided into building lots and could be purchased by the highest bidder. This fact is proved by a blue print which Harry Mason, land agent for the Lehigh & Wilkes-Barre Coal Company, has just presented to the City of Wilkes-Barre. The blue print is taken from a map of the river front made about 1820. The original map is now in the library of A. H. McClintock, Esq. Mr. Mason saw the original a few days ago and he immediately made a blue print of it. When the original drawing was made South River street was known as Front street and it appears as such on the map. The drawing shows both sides of Front street between the present location of West South street and the location of West Union street. Market street was known as Center street. Above and below Center street were the upper and lower ferries. An enterprising real estate dealer perhaps the pioneer in this business in the early Wilkes-Barre, had the map prepared. On the river side of Front street there was a strip of land 179 perches long, this being the present river common. This strip of land was divided into 25 building lots. Each lot was 5 perches in width. Between each lot was a strip of land a single perch in width so that there would be uniformity in the lots as well as a vacant space on which nothing could be built. In front of these lots, and accordingly inscribed on the map, the plot owners were to leave a space 5 perches wide extending along the entire common for use as a public walk. Besides the building lots there was plenty of room for the approaches to the ferry and, later, for the bridge at the end of Center street. However, these building lots did not appeal strongly to the early residents and they went unsold, because it was as late as 1869 when the municipality secured the title to the ground. On the opposite side of Front street the map shows the buildings then standing on the street. Near the present location of West Union street there were several hotels and roadhouses. Near old Center street was a bank. Below Center street and extending down to the southern end of Front street were the houses of such early residents as Lord Butler, R. Welles, Jacob Gist, the Hollenback family, George Chohoon and the Morgan family. The names of these people all appear over houses which were drawn in the map. Mr. McClintock, the owner of the original map, will not part with it although a number of people, who collect historical relics, have repeatedly attempted to secure the map, now yellow from age and dust.

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4, 1916

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