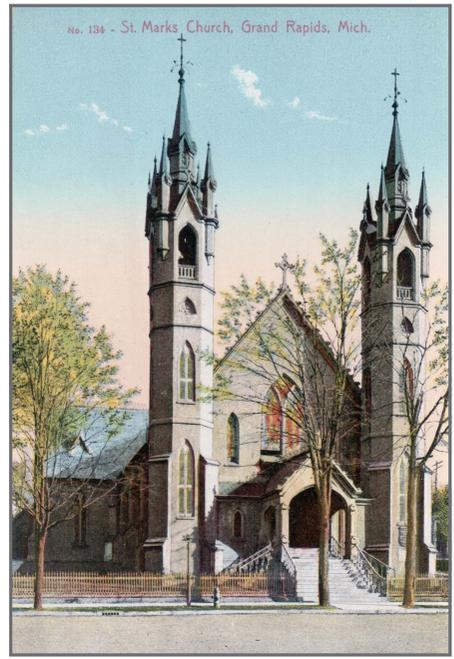


BUILDING A CITY

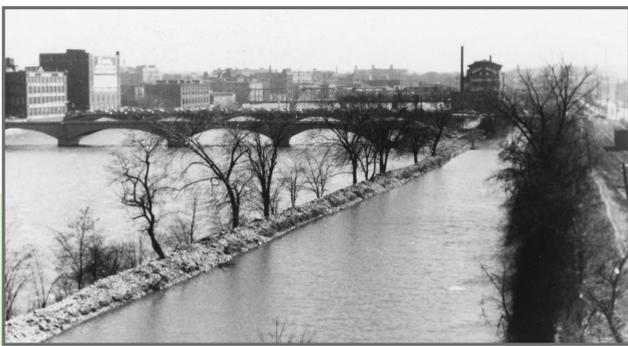
WHERE DID THE RAPIDS GO?

People have been changing the Grand River Watershed for thousands of years. The pace and magnitude of change increased with the arrival of Euro-American settlers in the 1820s. These changes and their consequences created the river we know today.

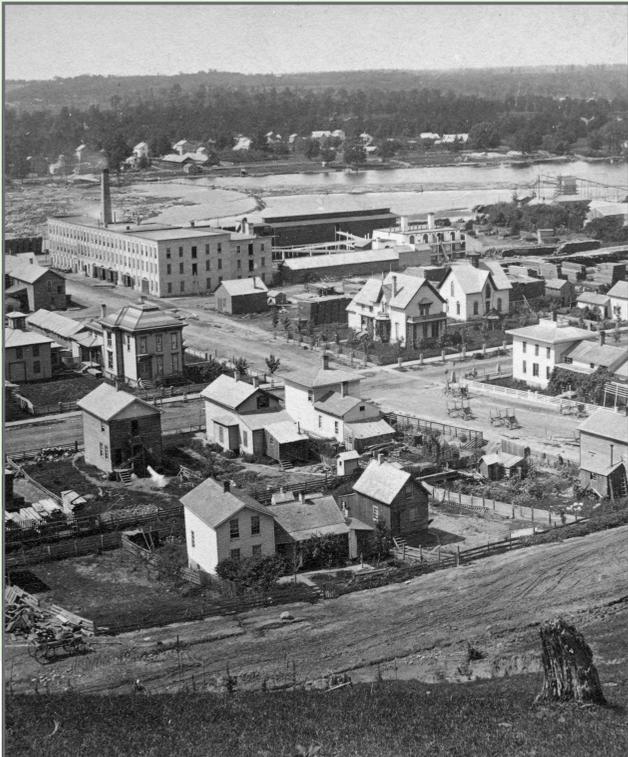
Hundreds of tons of limestone were removed from the Grand River by early settlers in an ultimately failed attempt to tame the rapids and make the river navigable for shipping. Several Grand Rapids buildings, including St. Mark's Church built in 1848, are constructed of the limestone removed from the river.



Limestone from the Grand River was used to build St. Mark's Church.



View looking south down the West Side Power Canal in Grand Rapids, c. 1900.



View looking Northwest across the Grand River at the Wing Dam, c. 1875.

BUILDING CANALS AND DAMS

In addition to removing rock from the river, early Grand Rapidians also began building canals and dams to harness and control its flow. A canal on the east side of the river was completed in 1842 and another on the west side in 1867. A series of dams through the city regulated the flow of water creating consistent water power for grain milling, saw milling and even the generation of hydroelectric power. Although the canals have been filled in, the dam across the river at Fourth Street remains today.

FLOOD CONTROL

In March 1904, an ice jam on the Grand River combined with heavy rains produced the worst flooding Grand Rapids has ever seen. The river rose to 19.5 feet, and without any flood protection, much of the lower west side was inundated. Soon afterwards an extensive network of flood walls was constructed to help protect the city.



A man rows a boat down a flooded residential street, 1904.



Construction of flood walls along the Grand River, 1908.

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