

A History of the Main Street in Deadwood

January 15, 2021

This paper presents a chronology of changes that have occurred on Main Street in Deadwood. It is intended to provide background for potential improvements that may be proposed in the Main Street Master Plan (2021) which is being developed. This history focuses on the street itself, not the buildings that frame it, because the focus on the plan is on the public realm. That said, some other events in local and national history are included as context.

A. Themes associated with the history of Main Street

In considering the history of the street, these themes emerge:

- It has been, and remains, a dynamic Place.
 - It has always been lively and a center of activity,
- Evolution and change are part of its heritage.
 - Changes have occurred in paving materials for travel lanes and sidewalks, various street lights have been installed over time and a range of furnishings have come and gone.
- It has been adaptable, accommodating different uses.
 - It has supported commerce, public gatherings and entertainment as well as some residential uses.
- The street itself has been an armature for utilities (above and below ground).
 - Overhead power lines have come and gone and a network of underground utilities has grown over time.
- It has always been a corridor for movement of people in a variety of ways.
 - This includes people on foot and in various types of conveyances including horses, autos and trolleys.
- It has always been a place for celebrations and community gatherings.
 - Parades, festivals, exhibitions and rallies are ongoing traditions that bring with them decorations, special structures and programmed activities.

B. Chronology of the evolution of the street:

1870s - 1877: The early street edge is defined by buildings only. (dirt street; no formal sidewalks or street paving)

- Some individual businesses have installed boardwalks of various types in front of their buildings.
- There are no continuous sidewalks, and no paving appears in street.

1874: Gold is discovered in the Black Hills.

1875-1876: Gayville Toll Road is founded; this sets the approximate path of Deadwood's Main Street.

June 8, 1876: The Black Hills Pioneer, the first newspaper, is published.

August 2, 1876: Wild Bill Hickok is killed by Crooked Nose Jack McCall.

October 7, 1876: Black Hills Weekly Pioneer describes a ditch and reservoir being created above City Creek.

December 1, 1876: The first telegraph line is activated.

- This connects Deadwood Gulch to Cheyenne. (December 2, 1876 Black Hills Weekly Pioneer)

1877: Chinatown develops along Lower Main.

1877-1879: Lots on Main Street are platted, which defines the street. (Museum staff, City of Deadwood and Deadwood Comprehensive HP Plan of 1991, pg 10)

1877 to 1879: A uniform line of wooden boardwalks is constructed in the core; the street itself remains unpaved. (Museum staff, City of Deadwood) Historic photos show:

- There are wood planks, possibly tongue and groove boards, that serve as a walkway. One can see rocks and/or supports maintaining a leveled appearance within the downtown core district.
- The elevation of the boardwalk with respect to building entries and road surface varies.

March 9, 1878: The first telephone lines are installed.

September 1879: Fire destroys the entire downtown business district of Deadwood – burning 300 buildings and leaving 3,000 people homeless.

1879: After the fire, rebuilding starts immediately.

- The street plan remains the same but new buildings are made of brick and stone.
- The county begins to regrade Main Street from Shine south. (Deadwood Comp. HP Plan of 1991, pg. 12; Upper Main Street, and Museum staff, City of Deadwood)

1879: Deadwood water system is established.

- Black Hills Canal & Water Company is granted a 20 year franchise to supply water to Deadwood. (pg. 26 of Comp HP Plan of 1991)
- Water lines were laid at corners of Williams and Deadwood Streets.
- Black Hills Daily Times reports that pipes were lined with coal tar and connected with white lead.

By 1879 a series of water flumes brings water to the mining camps.

1880: Town of Deadwood is incorporated; census population is 10,000.

1880: Bulkheads (basement accesses) are installed in various locations along Deadwood and Whitewood Creeks. (See newspapers: February 21, 1880 Weekly Pioneer Times; March 13, 1880; April 18, 1880.)

March 1, 1881: The document, An Act to Incorporate the City of Deadwood Dakota Territory provides the foundation for future work in way of street improvements, utilities, sanitation, and maintenance. (February 12, 1881 Black Hills Weekly Times newspaper)

- Section 18 *"The mayor and council shall have the power to extend, open, widen, grade, pave, macadamize or otherwise improve and keep in repair ... any street, sidewalk, alley, avenue or lane within the limits of the city."*
- Section 24 *"To lay out the city into districts for the purpose of establishing a system of sewerage and drainage, and to levy and collect a special tax upon real estate in any such district for the purpose of constructing sewers and drains thereof."*

March 1, 1881: The document, An Act to Incorporate the City of Deadwood Dakota Territory provides for erection of lamp posts (February 12, 1881 Black Hills Weekly Times newspaper)

- Section 10 *"To provide for the lighting of streets, laying down of gas pipes and erection of lamp posts, and to regulate the sale of gas, and the rent of gas meters, within the city; and to provide for, regulate and control other methods of lighting said city."*

May 18, 1883: Flood on Main Street destroys 150 buildings and kills 3 people

- After the flood streets are made wider and straighter (pg. 29 of Comp HP Plan).

December 22, 1883: The first electric lights are turned on in Deadwood Gulch. The power station is located at 65 Sherman Street and consists of 1 dynamo with the capacity of 15 lights of 2,000 candle power. (December 26, 1883 Black Hills Daily Times)

1883: Multiple bulkheads (basement accesses) are installed in sidewalks.

1886: The core of Main Street is paved in macadam.

- January 5, 1886: Resolution is introduced to macadamize and gutter Main Street from the Opera House to Witzel's Blacksmith Shop. Lee Street also is in the scope of work.
- May 25, 1886: City Council accepts Thomas Jones' proposal to install underground sewer lines, a storm sewer system and manholes, in addition to macadamize and gutter Main Street, consisting of 81 lots.
- July 4, 1886: The Black Hills Daily Times newspaper provides account on macadam paving on Main Street.
 - Sandstone curb & gutter is added in as well.
- September, 1886: Macadam paving and stone curb are completed.

By June 1886, there are 16 fire hydrants in Deadwood.

Post 1886: Manholes appear in historic photos from this time.

July 4, 1888: Photo of Hub-and-Hub race shows temporary railings along sidewalk for crowd control.

1888: The Deadwood Street Railway, a horse drawn trolley system, is incorporated.

- Photographs show the rails embedded in the middle of the street.

1889: South Dakota Statehood

1890: Photograph shows sidewalk with board extensions at the corner.

1890(?): Photo shows special booths on Main Street, occupying one travel and parking lane.

1892: ORDINANCE No. 37 Relating to Sidewalks is passed establishing a minimum width.

- *"Section #01 "It is hereby made the duty of the owner, agent or occupant of all real estate or adjoining upon any of the public streets of the city of Deadwood... to construct, build, maintain and keep in good repair... a good and substantial sidewalk of not less than **six feet in width.**" REF.1892.01.1 Ordinances of the City of Deadwood*

1892: ORDINANCE No. 55 is passed regarding use of sidewalk for displays.

- pages 72 – 73 prohibiting the obstruction of sidewalks "...Provided that any person engaged in business in the city, may use for display of his goods, wares, and merchandise, a space on the sidewalk not to exceed three feet in width, along and next to the building occupied by him..."

1893: The Deadwood Street Railway is discontinued due to lack of patronage.

1893: Nationwide Economic Panic leads to a depression.

1894: Two downtown blocks in the commercial area are destroyed by fire.

1896: The Bullock Hotel opens

1896: Photograph shows continuous boardwalk on Lower Main.

1898: The Grantz reserve property on upper Main is legally opened to the public.

- This enables the City to claim the full ROW for a Main Street thoroughway (Mark Wolfe).

1890s: Photograph shows temporary railings for parade event along the street.

- These are constructed of wood posts and wire.

1890s: Photograph shows ornamental watering trough on Main Street.

Late 1890: Fremont, Elkhorn and Missouri Valley Railroads reach Deadwood, bringing a building and mining boom.

1900: Photo shows Welcome Arch spanning Main Street.

1902: Underground gas lines are installed.

- Deadwood Gas Company builds a plant near Volin Street in the spring of 1902.
- On September 14, 1902 the gas is turned on.
- Ten days later, the local newspaper indicated there are 150 subscribers that had mains going to their properties.

1902: Photograph shows shielded lights on strings over Main Street.

1902: Electric trolley line opens between Deadwood and Lead.

1903: Water service is extended to Upper Main Street (Mark Wolfe).

1903: ORDINANCE NO. 293 is passed, related to sidewalk material.

- Prohibits the laying of wooden sidewalks on certain streets in the City of Deadwood and specifying materials and specifications for sidewalks and curbing on said streets.
- The booklet titled, An Ordinance Regulating the Construction of Buildings in the City of Deadwood, provides details on the construction, materials, and regulations to new **concrete** sidewalks.

June 7, 1903: Deadwood City Council approves a resolution for paving Main, Lee, Deadwood and part of Sherman Streets.

July 4, 1903: The Franklin Hotel opens.

1904: Sewer lines are extended to Upper Main Street (Mark Wolfe).

1904: Concrete sidewalks replace wooden ones in the core of Main Street (pg. 32 of Comp HP Plan, as reported in the Daily Pioneer-Times)

- Main south of the school and Lower Main remain without concrete sidewalks.

1904-1905: Street is widened and concrete sidewalks are installed south of the school and in Lower Main as part of the Sunnyside Addition (Upper Main Street. Mark Wolfe).

May, 1905: First automobile appears in Deadwood.

September 1907: Brick paving project begins on Sherman Street.

- Work constitutes removing macadam paving, laying concrete base and installing Purington brick pavers.
- New concrete curb and gutter replaces the sandstone curb stops.

1907: Concrete curb and gutter is installed.

- See September 1907 Purington Brick installation.
- Concrete curb and gutter replaces the sandstone curbs.

July 1908: Edison lights (unshielded) are strung overhead

- The Consolidated Power & Light Company receives permission to install strings of colored lights (crimson and gold) across the streets in intervals of 50 feet. Each string contains 25 lights.
- The strands extend from 607 Main Street to the Masonic Temple (715 Main Street).
- Lights are installed for the upcoming Pa-Ha-Sa-Pa carnival, August 10-15.

1909: String lights appear in photos taken by Wyoming photographer J.H. Stimson (See Stimson collection on display in the Deadwood City Hall.)

1912: Lights on metal poles are installed.

- These are a five globe design on short, dark poles.

1912: W.E. Adams donates drinking fountains to the City of Deadwood.

1924: The “Days of 76” event begins.

1925: Photo shows booths in one parking lane.

1928: Photo shows three-globe lights on dark poles.

1928: Photo shows free-standing signs on the sidewalk.

1928: Stone steps (for disembarking from carriages?) appear in photos.

1935: Upper Main Street is paved to support residential development

1938: The first Sturgis Rally occurs.

1942: Homestake Gold Mine shuts down during WWII.

1948: Parking meters are installed in the downtown core.

- 250 parking meters are approved by the Deadwood City Council for a nine month trial.
- McGee meters and poles are placed on Main, Lee, Deadwood, Sherman, Siever, and Pine Streets.

1950s: Asphalt paving is installed in the core of Main Street.

1950s: Photos shows lights that are taller, a three globe design, with a lighter color base.

- Single globes are used at the corners.

1950s: Photo shows large wood and glass booth at sidewalk edge.

1961: Deadwood is designated a National Historic Landmark.

1964-1967: DOT builds new highway parallel to Main to relieve traffic pressure.

- This is the box culvert project.

1974: Photo shows cobra head lights on wood poles.

1989: Deadwood institutes legalized, limited gaming with proceeds dedicated to preserving Deadwood's heritage.

1989: The Secretary of the Interior establishes the Period of Significance for the National Historic Landmark to be 1875-1939.

1991: City Archaeologists unearth a limestone box drain and portions of the macadam paving (Images on file in Research Laboratory.)

1991-1992: New brick paving is installed in the core, similar to historic design.

- City archaeologists unearth remnants of trolley rails.

1992: Parking meters are removed in the core.

1994: New sidewalks, curbs, gutters and new street services are provided on upper Main Street (Upper Main Street. Mark Wolfe).

- This includes new water lines, sewer mains, street lights, and retaining wall repair.

2002: Overhead utility lines are removed in the core of Main.

- (Back of Main Project)

2017-2018: New wayfinding signs are installed.

2018 (?): Balcony overlook along Gold Street is reconstructed.

2020: Temporary vehicular and pedestrian controls are put in place for events.

- These are removeable barriers.

2020: Outlaw Square & Stage is completed.

2020: A dining deck overlooks Outlaw Square.