

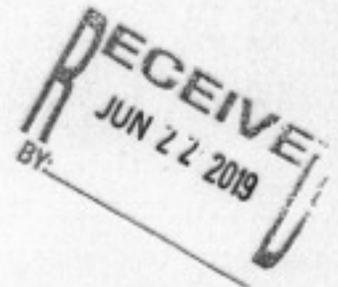
Etter, Minnesota: A History

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Eric M. Johnson: A History

This work is dedicated to Virginia McGrath, grandmother of the author.

Without her stories and willingness to tell them, this paper would not have been possible.

Dr. Virginia York

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On Saturday August 29th, 1981, Etter died. Etter died not from natural causes, from sudden tragedy or catastrophe. Etter died from the rap of an auctioneer's gavel. The death of Etter may read like an obituary headline, or a somber line from a novel. Etter, however, is not a person, but rather, was a city in Ravenna Township in southern Dakota County, Minnesota. Etter began from modest means and grew into a modest settlement that was never officially incorporated as a "city" but remained always a "village." Etter was the lasting legacy of Alexander W. Etter, a pioneer and businessman in pretty much every industry known to the 19th Century. Etter was never a large place, and as a non-incorporated community, the official population of it, or its official "city limits," is also undocumented. It is likely that the population of the area known then, and still today, as Etter was never more than 250 people.

Etter is a unique place. Etter was never an incorporated community, so there is no official City of Etter charter, map, land ownership, city services, etc. Although not an official city, Etter is an official place in the same sense that it has a specific location that people associate it with today. For those too young to remember a time when Etter existed, those born after 1980, Etter is best described as the area around the intersection of Dakota County Highway 54 heading south from Hastings and Dakota County Highway 68. For those unaffiliated with the area, or for those locals unfamiliar with local highway nomenclature, the pinpoint of Etter is the "fork in the road where if you turn left, you go to Treasure Island Resort and Casino." Adding to the uniqueness of Etter is that there is no longer any official remnants of its existence. Again, there is no city charter or other existing paperwork. The city fell victim to recurring floods from the Vermillion River many times throughout the 1970s which eventually led to the city's eventual demise and purchase by the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Etter is a ghost town without a

legacy as there are no longer businesses, street signs, houses, or any other permanent structure remaining to tell passersby that the intersection of Highways 68 & 54 was ever a town.

Adding to the uniqueness of Etter is that the town kept a very separate identity from the remainder of societal happenings at the time. For Etter to have died in August 1981, Etter must have been born. While unable to find an exact birthday of Etter, it can be said that Etter was born in 1871 with the laying of the railroad tracks through the river bottoms south of Hastings. The tracks belonged to the Chicago, Milwaukee, & St. Paul railroad. Rail exploded as an engineering marvel and as a means of industry and transportation in the United States following the American Civil War of 1861-1865. The total American rail length exploded from 35,085 miles in 1865 to 70,784 miles in 1873.¹ While total mileage of American railroads doubled, the peak year of all of the expansion in the great rail race of the post war era was 1871- the same year that the track comes to Etter. 1871 saw 7,670 miles of rail laid with a vast majority of it being laid in the Midwest. Etter was one of many towns to blossom across the country thanks to the new rail lines, however Etter remained long past the removal of those lines in 1929. Unlike the dozens of small towns that crop up around the rail and fade away when the rail leaves, Etter remained in place with several businesses left in operation as well. In addition, Etter continues to be swollen with hometown pride and enthusiasm for such a tight knit and unique town. Continuing into the 1980s, residents still described themselves as being "better from Etter."²

The story of Etter is uniquely told. Etter has no official depository of old records nor did Etter have an official territory to be discovered or discussed. Etter is a vague description that encompasses the southern half of Section 21 in Ravenna Township. Thus the story of Etter must

¹ Richard White, *Railroaded: The Transcontinentals and the Making of Modern America* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2011), 50.

² Jackie Tuin, Eulogy of Helen McGrath, April 13, 2019.

be told by way of the people who lived there, the businesses that were there, the railroad, and the floods that eventually will overtake the town. In telling the story of Etter, many different sources will be used- mostly newspapers, plat maps, and personal accounts of life "in the city." The story of Etter is one never fully told in so long a volume as this, and hopefully this work does the story of Etter the justice it deserves.

What's there to see in Etter?

In the 1850s, the area that would become Etter, was a pretty quiet place. The land that made up southern Dakota County during that decade consisted of mile after mile of rolling hill and prairie grasses. What would soon become Ravenna Township was much wetter near the Vermillion River bottoms and backwater channels that today make for great trout fishing. Ravenna Township has some excellent high land that makes for good farming and excellent views of the country around it, while the bottoms and the lowlands near Etter are much wetter and prone to flooding- especially during a wet spring or a heavy summer rain. "During high water, this portion of the town overflows, to a depth of from eight to fifteen feet."³ Continuing to use 1871 as the "birthday" of Etter, it is interesting to note how quickly the town develops after the laying of the tracks by Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul. By 1874, it is reported that "Etter is becoming quite a neighborhood town" boasting a store, saloon, warehouse, and blacksmith among other amenities.⁴ The station at Etter is what brought the town to life. Many settlers had come to Dakota County from hither and yond to have their shot at owning a large and successful farming operation. Families from all corners of the world settled in the hopes of owning property, meeting their demands of food and shelter, and hopefully being able to pass that bounty

³ Franklin Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Dakota and Goodhue counties, Minnesota*, (Chicago: H.C. Cooper Jr. 1910) 340.

⁴ *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), Oct. 3, 1874.

on to their children. Alexander W. Etter was one of those settlers. A. W. Etter had come to Minnesota, originally of Indiana, in the late 1850s and had homesteaded land in Ravenna Township sometime after 1856. A. W. Etter had the advantageous luck of owning the land that the Chicago, Milwaukee, and St. Paul Railroad wanted to lay tracks through in 1871. The land was purchased from Etter and the station was built and it was named in honor of the man who owned the land. Thus, the town named "Etter" came about.⁵

Soon after the construction of the rail station, a post-office was established there at Etter with A. W. Etter as its first postmaster. Mr. Etter held that post until January 1881 when he appointed N. J. Olson as postmaster.⁶ The train station doubled as the post office and telegraph office. Seeing a boom town in sight, as was very common when the rail ran through the west, A. W. Etter capitalized on the new opportunities that lay ahead of the small town. "In 1873, he opened a stock of general merchandise and he also built a warehouse for the purpose of buying grain."⁷ Soon after the rail, August Behrmann opened a blacksmith shop of his own in 1872. It ran a pretty good business as it was the only blacksmith shop in town and demand for such a thing was high in those days.⁸ A. W. Etter, as Etter was a busy station in Minnesota during the timber trade of the 1870s, established a lumberyard at Etter across the road from the rail station. Much like a grain elevator simply held as a place to store grain in between harvest and sale, or sale and transport, A. W. Etter build his lumberyard to serve the same purpose to hold lumber at Etter between sale and transport to St. Paul. The "woodyard" as A. W. Etter called it, was built in

⁵ Franklin Curtiss-Wedge, *History of Dakota and Goodhue counties, Minnesota*, (Chicago: H.C. Cooper Jr. 1910) 344.

⁶ Rev. Edward D. Neill, *History of Dakota County and the City of Hastings* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881), 453.

⁷ "Unusual bits of Local History Woven around Etter Railroad Station," *Over the Years* 19, no. 4 (1979): 2.

⁸ Rev. Edward D. Neill, *History of Dakota County and the City of Hastings* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881), 453-454.

1873 and at the time held 300 cords of wood. Sadly, as was common, A.W. Etter lost 500 cords of wood in a fire at his woodyard in December 1874. The loss of the lumber in the woodyard was not the only financial setback for A.W. Etter. In 1873, Etter was busy building a grain elevator as that was another staple of trade to pass through the station at Etter in those days. At the time it was built it must have been one of the largest structures in the area, as Alexander Etter boasted that the elevator could hold 10,000 bushels of grains. Unfortunately, the elevator collapsed in September 1881. At the time, the Elevator was still under the ownership of Etter, and he lost the structure, 8,000 bushels of wheat, three horses of his own, and two tramps that were employed at the elevator.⁹ Following this loss, Alexander Etter had left the town named for him in search of other ventures in Willmar, Minnesota.

Even after the withdrawal of Alexander Etter from life in his own city, his legacy was quite visible in the remainder of the 19th and early 20th Century. The railroad station named for him carried his name until 1929 when the tracks were moved a few miles to the east to run near the Prairie Island Community. The rail served a very important purpose as it connected Etter to the outside world. Day Samuelson was raised by his aunt and uncle in Etter in the 1910s and recalled riding the train to Hastings to attend high school- paying 32 cents each way in fares.¹⁰ Day Samuelson was raised by his aunt and uncle: Mr. and Mrs. Nels Nelson. Nels Nelson served as the station master of Etter Station for 42 years, taking over the job from Alexander Etter when he left the city. The rail boasted continuous service from Minneapolis to Winona in 1871, and soon after from Minneapolis to La Crosse in 1873.¹¹ The Post office, also started under the leadership and direction of Alexander Etter, served Etter until 1927 before being merged with

⁹ "Elevator Collapsed," *Saint Paul Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), Sept 17, 1881.

¹⁰ "Unusual bits of Local History Woven around Etter Railroad Station," *Over the Years* 19, no. 4 (1979): 2.

¹¹ Copied letter from Gustav Monson of Etter, N.d.

other area post offices in Welch and Hastings. The general merchandise store started by Etter, served residents of Etter and the local area into the 1950s, "It was kind of handy because they had butter and bread and milk and canned goods."¹² The Grain Elevator, also created by Alexander Etter, continued to serve the area until the mid-1890s. The elevator was sold to Frank and Jessie Yanz of Hastings in 1882. They operated the elevator before selling to Frank and Max Albers in 1887, and in 1890 it was sold again to Joe Hinnikers. Hinnikers experienced the same misfortune as Alexander Etter when it came to owning the elevator. Where A.W. Etter's business "fell in on itself", Hinnikers's "went up in smoke" when the Elevator caught fire in March of 1892. The building was a complete loss as well as the 2,700 bushels of wheat, 1,300 bushels of flax, and 200 bushels of oats all stored inside. All told, the loss totaled \$5,000 in 1892, which when adjusted for inflation, amounts to \$141,000 today.¹³ Etter remained an active town filled with businesses started by or once owned by Alexander W. Etter long into the 20th Century.

Per federal law, Section 16 of Ravenna Township was set aside as public land for the purpose of building a school. However, Section 16 was never pursued as a location for the building of a school in Ravenna Township, likely due to the fact that Section 16 is home to many of the marshes that today surround the Vermillion River as it winds towards Etter. In 1856, residents of the township hired a teacher to educate the growing number of children on the frontier in Ravenna Township. A school was proposed in Section 8 but was never built, and nor was the school proposed in Section 36. Etter was eventually the third school to be built in the region and was incorporated as District No. 28. The school was located in originally in Section 29 and was moved to Etter in 1873 when a new school was built. The school at Etter Station was

¹² Al Shaffer, "Long time Etter resident sees her town dwindle," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), May 21, 1981.

¹³ The Inflation Calculator, westegg.com/inflation/infl.cgi.

a "frame house, eighteen by twenty-five feet and built at a cost of \$180."¹⁴ The school in Etter stood for the better part of the next 100 years. The building continued to operate as a country school No. 28 until 1944. Then, during the push for school consolidation and to better allocate teachers and resources was too much for the small country school. At the end of the 1943-1944 school year, the Etter school was closed and consolidated with the nearby, and much larger, Hastings School District. The graduating class of 1944 only had one student. The school had dozens of pupils enrolled, but by chance the last graduating class was a class of one. That student was named Orrie Wohlers. Orrie lived only a couple miles north of Etter his whole life, and descendants of him still live on the family farm in Section 32 of Ravenna Township. Orrie was always proud of his claim to fame as the last graduate of "Etter Tech." Now, the name "Etter Tech" is yet another example of the massive hometown pride of Etter. After the school had long been closed, there were some students from Etter at the local Hastings High School who used to gather (for less than academic purposes) in some abandoned barns and buildings in Etter. One of the many pranks that was played by these students was the renaming of the old Etter schoolhouse, which by this time had been repurposed as the Ravenna Township Hall, to "Etter Tech." Some students, reportedly one dozen, had even made personalized pink knit sweaters with white lettering across the back that said "Etter Tech." These sweatshirts even got a shoutout in the 1964 class yearbook, the *Spiral*.¹⁵ Michael McGrath, a resident of Etter and a member of that graduating class, is rumored to be the ringleader of the "Etter Tech" movement- as recalled by fellow classmates.

¹⁴ Rev. Edward D. Neill, *History of Dakota County and the City of Hastings* (Minneapolis: North Star Publishing Company, 1881), 453.

¹⁵ *Hastings High School Spiral*, Hastings, MN, 1964. 140-141.

Like any good frontier settlement, Etter had a church. During the early days of settlement in Ravenna township, there had been many different religious services and structures built according to different Christian traditions including Baptists, Methodists, Lutherans, and Presbyterians. A church was built in Etter in 1896 as a part of the Bethany Presbyterian Mission. The church held many services there on a regular basis, interring the dead at the nearby Ravenna Cemetery in Section 16 of the township, also known as Elliot's Hill Cemetery having been used as a frontier burial ground since 1855. The Presbyterians couldn't keep a clean title to the land, and it was sold to the Lutherans in 1907 being renamed the Immanuel Lutheran Church. The church held services regularly as well under the new name- twice a month- with pastors being supplied from the nearby Red Wing Seminary School. Preachers would arrive to the town by train from Red Wing to tend the frontier congregation of nearly 50 people. The church was a focal point of life within the small town. The twice monthly services at the church drew most everyone affiliated with the church when held. Baptisms and Funerals were also spectacle occasions for the small town, so much so that the local school dismissed classes for half of the day for children to attend funerals held at the church down the street. Many families were involved with the maintenance of the church and the operations of the church as well, but eventually the church was sold by the Lutherans in 1921.¹⁶

Proud People

More than anything else, Etter was filled with people that, while small in number, were filled with pride for their hometown. Etter was "quite the neighborhood town" in both infrastructure in the late 1800s and early 1900s, but had also built a neighborhood atmosphere

¹⁶ Author Unknown, "The Old Lutheran Church at Etter." N.d.

along with it. Holidays and Baptisms at the Immanuel Lutheran Church were always joyful occasions that brought the small community together. The residents of Etter even went so far as to found a booster club, called Etter-on-the-Mississippi, in 1921 to continue to build the little rural rail station. The residents of Etter wrote to the nearby Hastings Gazette,

“Hastings is a good town, but it has no monopoly on the Father of Waters... Hurrah for Etter-on-the-Mississippi, State of Minnesota, and the United States of America. We have no dead ones here; we have plenty of community spirit and social entertainment.”¹⁷

In times of success and in times of trouble, Etter has always been known for its community spirit, and true to the letter in 1921, it was never in short supply. There are some more notable residents of Etter, MN- just as every town must have a celebrity or two.

The first notable character in Etter is the namesake of the town itself, Alexander W. Etter. A.W. Etter fits into the narrative of Minnesota quite well. He comes from the east, Indiana specifically, and ventures to the new frontier of Minnesota in the late 1850s. A.W. Etter homesteads some land in Section 21 in Ravenna Township in the 1860s and becomes a Midwestern farmer on the frontier- just as hundreds of thousands of others had in that decade. The population in Minnesota saw a dramatic uptick from about 6,000 in 1850 to 172,000 in 1860.¹⁸ A.W. Etter caught a lucky break in 1871 during the boom of the American Rail industry after the Civil War when the amount of American rail lines doubled in just seven years. The Etter Station was built on A.W. Etter’s property and the station named after him. Within just two years, A.W. Etter would become the first “baron of Etter” with several businesses and enterprises

¹⁷ *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN) Mar. 5, 1921.

¹⁸ Mary Jo Webster, “Welcome to the 1860s when most Minnesotans were born in another Country,” *Star Tribune* (Minneapolis, MN), May 25, 2017. <http://www.startribune.com/welcome-to-the-1860s-when-most-minnesotans-were-born-in-another-country/422124103/>

to his name. Etter found official office as the first postmaster of the Etter post office, and plenty of prestige from owning many businesses in town such as the lumberyard, grain elevator, general goods store, and the nicest house in town known to many as the "Etter Hotel" because it looked nice enough to pass as a hotel. A.W. Etter found himself famous enough to be reported by name in the *St. Paul Globe* in 1881 when he was in town on business, for staying at the International Hotel.¹⁹ However, just with every boom industry or boom town, there eventually comes a bust. For Alexander Etter, the bust came when the elevator collapsed on itself in 1881. A.W. Etter had suffered a large economic loss with the loss of the elevator, and thus he sold the elevator and all of his other holdings and moved north to Willmar, MN. There, A.W. Etter managed hotels, including his most successful venture there, the Spottswood House.²⁰ The hotel management in Willmar was short lived, as A.W. Etter moved to find work in California in the late 1880s. Alexander Etter continued to manage hotels all over California including in Redding, Salinas, Monrovia, and Los Angeles before getting invested in one of the booming industries of the 1890s: oil. A.W. Etter was one of 10 men from Redding to incorporate the Phoenix Land and Oil Company in Shasta County, near Los Angeles in 1901. The men secured 2,000 acres of land in the Stinking Canyon and began to take part in the booming California Oil industry that was producing 3,500 barrels of oil each day in the greater Los Angeles Area alone.²¹ This venture proved short lived for Alexander Etter as he met a tragic accidental death in February 1903 after being hit by a streetcar in Los Angeles. Etter was trying to remove a horse from the path of the streetcar, and due to wet conditions, the car could not stop on wet rails. A.W. Etter was 69 years old.²² Little did he think that the town he created would outlive him and keep the same name.

¹⁹ "At the International," *Saint Paul Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), Jan. 15, 1881.

²⁰ "Former Willmarite Killed," *Willmar Tribune* (Willmar, MN), Feb. 14, 1903.

²¹ "Los Angeles oil men facing a surplus," *San Francisco Call* (San Francisco, CA), Mar. 10, 1901.

²² "Met Violent Death," *Los Angeles Times* (Los Angeles, CA), Feb. 6, 1903.

After Alexander Etter moved away from his beloved Etter Station, life seemed to carry on as normal, as it always has in small towns across the Midwest. The people who had lived in Etter, continued to do so and carried on with the business of the town such as farming, church on Sundays, sending their children to school, and watching the trains go by. Farming continued in Ravenna Township just as it did across the Midwest. Farmers from Etter took out ads in newspapers as far away as Minneapolis looking for hands to tend their farms.²³ Life in Etter was pretty typical for the small Midwestern town, as historian Timothy Mahoney has stated,

“The small town was the place many city residents had left behind. [...] There, residents maintained the old ways and lived more cohesive lives, even as they balanced limited local economic opportunities with a desire to modernize somewhat apace with the city. Small-town boosterism now heralded the values of smallness and modest growth. People living in a small society were more organically connected to each other and thus had stronger senses of identity, social responsibility, and morality. From the 1870s through the 1910s small-town life was mostly portrayed in this positive light.”²⁴

Replacing A.W. Etter as the “baron of Etter” was a Norwegian Immigrant by the name of Einar M. Veseth. Einar Veseth first came to Etter from Montana in 1903 when he purchased 536 acres of land from Max Albert for the whopping sum of \$14,000.²⁵ The first time that the author had ever heard the name “Einar Veseth” was from an energetic and long winded story teller named Clair Hanson. Mr. Hanson had lived in and around the Prairie Island Indian Community his entire life- just a handful of miles away from Etter. Mr. Hanson spoke at length of the history of

²³ “Wanted-Man for Farmwork,” *Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), Mar 27, 1901.

²⁴ Timothy R. Mahoney, “The Small City in American History,” *Indiana Magazine of History* 99, December 2003 (2003): 317.

²⁵ “Hastings Minn.,” *Minneapolis Journal* (Minneapolis, MN), Nov. 21, 1903.

the local area, as it was his specialty of knowledge and his favorite topic to speak. Clair spoke at that time, of how Einar Veseth had owned the Etter Bridge and that he made his fortune by charging people to use the pulley bridge while the new one was in construction. As research for this history began, Mr. Hanson was proven correct. There was a bridge crossing the Vermillion River in Etter, on what is now Dakota County Highway 68, built in 1890. The bridge was Bridge No. 740, and was completed at a cost of \$2,000.²⁶ The bridge was a steel pin bridge that collapsed under the weight of a team of horses in 1914. In need of a new bridge, that is where Einar Veseth got involved since he owned the land on both sides of the Vermillion River in both Goodhue and Dakota Counties, and thus was compensated for the land to build the bridge. The new bridge was a steel truss bridge that was a single lane wide with a deck width of 14.8 feet. The bridge was purchased from the Illinois Steel Bridge Company and construction cost a total of \$3,290 and was completed in May 1914.²⁷ Einar Veseth was the person who made the most money off of the bridge's construction, earning a total of \$427.60 at a time that a brand new Ford Runabout cost just \$390.²⁸ Einar Veseth built an impressive estate in Etter, starting with his home. Einar Veseth purchased the "Etter Hotel" in 1903, originally constructed by A.W. Etter. Veseth renovated the house in 1905 with perhaps the most impressive feature of the property being the water tower which supplied the house with indoor plumbing in the bathroom!²⁹ Veseth had amassed a farm of 1,100 acres by the time of his death in 1949, including the Etter Church, purchased during a foreclosure in 1916, a barn measuring 80x40 feet, a machine shed, and two 120 foot long buildings used for miscellaneous agricultural purposes. The Veseth farm sat largely vacant after the 1950s, with some of the buildings falling in on themselves over time,

²⁶ "Bridge Finished," *Saint Paul Globe* (Saint Paul, MN), Mar. 1, 1890.

²⁷ "The Etter Bridge," *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), May 16, 1914.

²⁸ *Hastings Gazette*, (Hastings, MN), Aug. 7, 1915.

²⁹ Tom Majeski, "Abandoned Etter Farmstead Had Running Water," *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), Jun. 1966.

while another building was washed away by flood waters in 1968, and another burned down in the mid-1970s by intoxicated teenagers from the area.

Etter, not to be outdone by big cities in the 1910s, modernized as much as it had to so as to not be left behind by history. Etter still had the rail station, grocery store, post office, and church. In addition, the highway was constructed through the city, and the telephone came along with it. Einar Veseth was the man in charge of getting the project off the ground, and in the early summer of 1910, Etter received 18 different phone lines. One could reach the Veseth household by dialing 15-4.³⁰

Washed Out

In a city so full of life and small town pride, what could possibly have brought Etter to a close? The thing that had been there all along- the Vermillion River- is what would sneak up on Etter. The residents of Etter have always disliked the rains as they flooded streets and dampened basements. Etter had been fighting the waters since the 1881 rains that made the ground so soft that the grain elevator collapsed. The floods were every here and there, certainly not regular occurrences in Etter. However, beginning in the late 1960s, record floods began to erode the spirit of the town. In 1968 there was a flash flood that caught many in Etter off guard. On May 15th, 1968, there were 5 ½ inches of rain that fell on Etter, flooding the Dry Run Creek, the Vermillion River, and Highway 68 altogether. The flood nearly killed two high school girls, Geri McGrath and Rhonda Freier, as their car was swept down the highway- the current of the waters too strong for the brakes on their small sedan. Flood waters had the car submerged to the doors and the girls had to be rescued from the roof of the car during the storm. In the aftermath, Etter

³⁰ "The Etter Line," *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), Jun. 4, 1910.

lost a few outbuildings and some livestock, and the flood deposited sand from the Vermillion River onto Highways 68 and 54 up to three feet deep.³¹ The flooding in Etter would continue for the next decade, with much emotion coming from those who wanted to stay in Etter and those who thought that the town was in the worst spot imaginable. After the flooding in 1968, the residents of Etter came to defend themselves in the local newspaper:

"A certain official in Hastings has been calling Etter a "rat hole" and inferring that anyone who is foolish enough to live here, deserves to have something like this happen. Evidently he is of the opinion that any family living in a stricken community are all rat-hole dwellers. The residents of Etter are wondering if this certain public official is forgetting the bad flooding of the City of Hastings a very short time ago? Are they rat-hole dwellers too? We residents don't think so, we enjoy our community and Hastings and wish he would take a little time to enjoy it too. If the ditch running through Etter had been taken care of years ago, as it should have been, this flood would very likely never have occurred."³²

The "Dry Run Creek" was a quaint water run that ran through Etter, and only ran on its own after a rain. However, after development in the high ground outside of Etter in Section 16 of Ravenna Township, the water ran differently through the creek. The creek was at one time, 10 feet deep, but by 1980 was only two or three feet deep. The Dry run was filled with fine white sand, that when the creek ran wet, all washed onto the highway through Etter. Howard Moechnig of the Dakota County Soil and Water District, estimated that "36,000 cubic yards of streambed erosion

³¹ "HHS Students Rescued from atop Submerged Car," *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), May 23, 1968.

³² *Hastings Gazette* (Hastings, MN), May 23, 1968.

has taken place. That's enough to cover two acres one and a half feet thick."³³ Starting in 1978, after a summer of heavy rains and lots of floods big and small in Etter, the debate on what to do about the Dry Run began to heat up. There were ways that the Dry Run could be fixed, however that estimated price tag rang up in the neighborhood of \$7,000,000.³⁴ The simple, and much cheaper fix, would be dredging the creek which cost Dakota County \$4,000 when it was carried out in 1966, but paying \$4,000 to dig out the Dry Run each time it rained seemed unfeasible as well. There were several ways to take on the Etter flooding, but for the 11 households that made up Etter, the output of public dollars wasn't a justifiable expense due to the small number of beneficiaries. The residents of Etter banded together to be their own advocates during the saga of "What would happen to Etter?" "If moving is the only alternative, that's what we'll have to do. I like living here [...] but I wouldn't like to drown either," Etter resident Susan Pechacek said.³⁵ The Etter residents banded together and began to petition government agencies for funding either to repair the flooding problems in Etter, or to begin a life anew elsewhere. Eventually, seven households of Etter residents who had experienced the worst of the flooding over the years found out that they were eligible for funding from the Department of Housing and Urban Development. Etter qualified for, and was approved, a \$381,500 relocation grant from Housing and Urban Development to be handled by the Dakota County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.³⁶

³³ Judy Hemp, "Relocation seems to be the only answer for Etter flood problem," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), May 1, 1980.

³⁴ Judy Hemp, "Evacuation funds may be available for Etter," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), May 15, 1980.

³⁵ Charlie Warner, "If moving is the only alternative, that's what we'll have to do," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), May 1, 1980.

³⁶ Kay Harvey, "Flood have eroded away tiny Etter's future," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), Sept. 1, 1981.

The End of an Etter-a

On Saturday August 29th, 1981, Etter died. After the relocation grant was approved many of the families effected by Etter flooding had sold out and moved away. Ursula Serres a resident of Etter since 1932, Michael and Viola Schaak and Dennis and Helen McGrath who raised a total of 23 children in Etter across the street from one another, Gordon and Susan Pechacek, and Tim Serres all moved out of Etter in 1981. "It seems a shame," said Helen McGrath, spokeswoman of the flooded out Etter families in the HUD grant.³⁷ What wasn't being relocated was sold at auction on August 29th and Etter essentially became closed. The flooding issue that had dominated conversations for the better part of five years at the Ravenna Township Hall, the old Etter schoolhouse, haunted the building as meetings continued to be held in the shell of what once sat along the road on Highway 68. Etter today remains a pleasant memory for those who grew up there and those from the area. Those who live around the area still testify to the beauty of the place. "You can't really blame them, it's really beautiful down there," said Michael Reardon of the Dakota County Housing and Redevelopment Authority.³⁸ There is not much left of Etter. Today, in the spring of the year when the brush is down, one can see remnants of old buildings on the Veseth property, one can cross a new Etter bridge built in 1995, and the Etter schoolhouse, and township hall, have been relocated to a pioneer village south of Hastings, but not before making a cameo appearance as a historic courtroom in the film, *Here on Earth*. Etter was "quite a neighborhood town," a quaint place to live tucked into the valley of the Vermillion River. Maybe someday the town will come back or a new industry will find its home in the river bottoms. Until then, the stories live on that they were "better from Etter."

³⁷ Al Shaffer, "Relief is near for Etter Residents," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), Jan. 1981.

³⁸ Kay Harvey, "Flood have eroded away tiny Etter's future," *Hastings Star* (Hastings, MN), Sept. 1, 1981.

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