

# A.N. Kinsman saves drowning child

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3 of 3

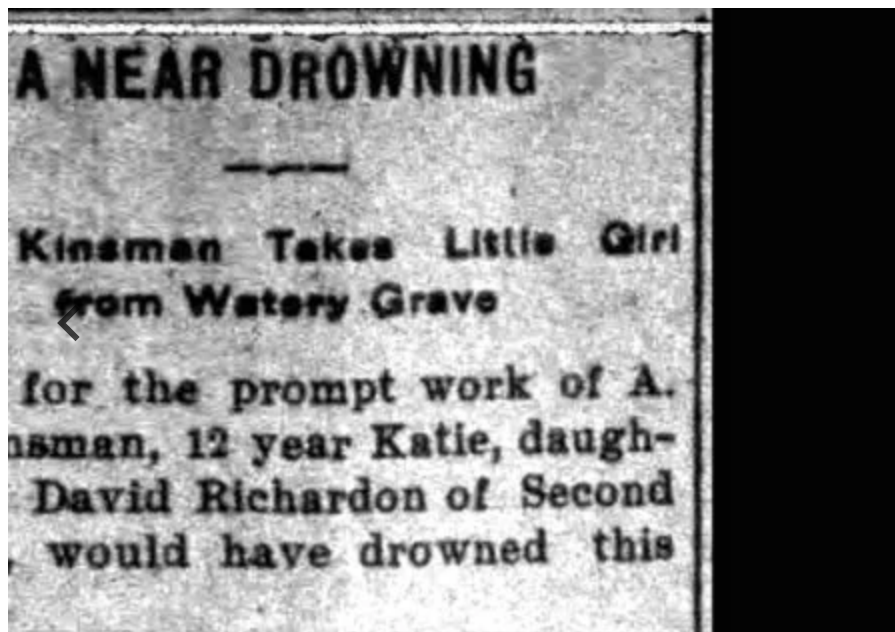


Photo provided

By **Tim Ruzek**

In early summer 1911, four children walked to the Cedar River for an afternoon of fishing at Austin’s Water Street dam. At the time, old Water Street (4th Ave NE) featured a steel trestle bridge that crossed the Cedar River above the dam, which provided water to power Campbell’s Peerless Flour mill on the east riverbank.

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With part of the dam dry, 12-year-old Katie Richardson and her friends worked their way at about 12:45 p.m. to the top of it. Katie unfortunately found a wet area to fish from.

“She slipped and tobogganed down the slide into the water, where it is about 15 feet deep,” the Herald wrote June 7, 1911.

Katie gave “one lusty yell before making the plunge.” Her friends were helpless except for using their voices, “and they used them to good advantage,” the Herald wrote.

The Kinsman family, which operated a large greenhouse business along the river’s west side below the dam (today’s Riverside Arena parking lot), heard the cries for help and looked out their windows to see Katie struggling in the water. The family lived at the greenhouse property about where city hall sits today.

Ai Kinsman – better known as A.N. Kinsman, owner of Kinsman Greenhouses, ran to the river and plunged in to catch “the little girl as she was sinking for the third time.” Katie grabbed onto Kinsman, “and it was with the greatest struggle that he swam with her toward the shore.”

Kinsman’s son Calvin put a plank in the water to help them onto land.

“Katie was not much hurt by her experience and was able to walk with assistance,” the Herald wrote. “She says she will never go fishing anymore.”

That evening’s Herald ran the headline: “A Near Drowning – A.N. Kinsman Takes Little Girl from Watery Grave.”

At the time, Kinsman Greenhouse was one of the largest greenhouse plants in greater Minnesota and eventually in the U.S. Northwest.

Known as a “lover of the water” and expert log roller on water, Kinsman and his wife, Mattie, were considered among Austin’s most-respected citizens before they relocated their business in 1926 to Miami, Florida.

Kinsmans were familiar with the danger and devastation of the river, including the 1903 and 1908 major floods that caused major damage to their greenhouses.

Kinsman had rescued the young girl from a 15-foot pool of water below the dam. This likely was a scour hole commonly formed in the riverbed below dams.

Four years later, a fisherman died in the same scour hole – listed as 18 feet deep – below the dam. He was fishing May 30, 1915, with another man – neither knew how to swim – in a row boat above the dam when higher flows swept them over.

George Krokos, a 22-year-old who emigrated from Greece two years earlier and worked at Hormel, drowned after getting caught in strong currents below the dam. The other man was rescued after he held onto the boat as it was carried away by the river to the Bridge Street bridge (2nd Ave NE), where he was rescued.

For two days, people searched for Krokos’ body using long poles and ropes with grappling hooks. Lower water on June 1 allowed a searcher to check the scour hole, where he was able to hook Krokos’ clothing with a long pole and recover his body. He was paid \$50 (nearly \$1,600 today).

Two divers had been prepared to search the river when Krokos’ body was found.

In 1966, two Austin police officers – Gene White and Chester Nelson – were called from a block away to the dam on the afternoon of Dec. 29 afternoon to save two cousins (both age 12) who fell into the river below the dam.

The boys had been playing in snow drifts near the dam under the Water Street bridge when they fell in. One boy was in the river, floating face down and unconscious when officers arrived.

“Nelson threw off his jacket and plunged into the water, working his way out to the boy with a cable, held at the bank by White,” the Herald wrote.

The boy was “blue and he wasn’t breathing when Nelson began giving him mouth-to-mouth resuscitation in the snow.”

The other boy got out of the water using a cable thrown to him. He was taken by ambulance to the hospital and released after treatment for exposure.

By the next day, the other boy was in good condition at the hospital.

Officer Nelson later went to the hospital and spent the night for observation and treatment for exposure. Officer White changed his wet clothes and reported back to work.