

**SOURCE OF THE LAKE:
150 YEARS OF HISTORY IN FOND DU LAC**

Clarence B. Davis, Ph.D., editor

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For my students, past, present, and future, with gratitude.

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PREFACE

This book of essays had its origin in a reevaluation of the History and Broad Field Social Studies curricula that was undertaken by the members of the History Program at Marian College in the spring of 1994. Beginning with the 1995-96 academic year, History majors and Broad Field Social Studies majors were required to prepare an original historical essay, making use of primary sources, as the capstone to these major programs at Marian College. In 1997, it was decided to transform this capstone into a three-semester sequence of courses in order to permit students the necessary time for research, writing, and polishing of the essay. More than two years ago, I decided to undertake this book project as a contribution to Fond du Lac's celebration of its sesqui-centennial.

From the beginning, students have been encouraged to pursue topics in local history in order to take advantage of the rich resources available in state and local repositories and to permit full and effective use of documentary collections by undergraduates who typically lack the resources or the time for travel to more remote collections. In recent years, local history has left far behind the largely unfair characterization that it appealed only to those interested in genealogy or antiquarianism. Paralleling changes in attitudes of professional historians that have led to the emergence of social history and women's history, and growing from the perspectives of the French *Annales* school that have emphasized the importance of the rhythms of "ordinary" life, local history has found an increasingly significant place in historical studies. From the perspective of Marian College students, most of whom are preparing to teach in Wisconsin schools, an intensive exploration of historical resources available in the community and State also makes a great deal of sense.

These essays all have stemmed from this Marian College History Program project. Focused on Fond du Lac County and the vicinity, they explore varied aspects of the community and its development. Adaptations to rural life, race relations, diversity, social reform movements, gender in society, political conflict, immigration, community iconography, impact of technology on the community, and commercial development and change are all themes that are explored in these essays, which have been loosely grouped

into three categories: Society and Culture, Politics, and Economy and Business. Each essay makes an individual effort to explore dimensions of the evolution of a multifaceted American community that has experienced enormous change and a variety of rhythms of growth and decline over a period of a century and a half.

One of the distinct pleasures of editing a volume such as this is the opportunity to work collaboratively with many others. In directing the research and writing of the papers and subsequently in editing them for publication, I have received the assistance, advice, and wisdom of many other people, whom it is my pleasure to thank here.

Librarians play a key role in historians' efforts, and several have been involved in the evolution of this book. Mary Ellen Gormican, Library Director, and Carolyn Colwell and Nima Ingle, reference librarians at Marian College's Cardinal Meyer Library, have been the first resource for beginning students. John Ebert and Sally Albertz, of the Adams House Resource Center at the Fond du Lac Historical Society, have dazzled everyone with their command of the large and complex collection of materials that is available in Fond du Lac. Mary Georgeff, of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin in Madison, has been kind enough each semester to provide an introduction to one of the finest state historical archives in the country and to conduct electronic searches of the State Historical Society data bases for the students who were involved in writing these papers. All these individuals have given much time and effort in supporting the students' research on their topics.

Other faculty members of the Marian College History Program, including Dr. James Ford, Dr. Mary Gross, Father Ron Jansch, Sr. Marie Scott, and Dr. Richard Whaley, all played roles in the completion of this project. They have read and commented on the papers and attended the presentations of completed research. Dr. Whaley carried on the direction of those papers that were in progress while I was on leave from Marian to teach in Europe in 1998-99, and he provided excellent background for all the students through his course on Wisconsin History. Father Ron and Dr. James Ford have been proofreaders nonpareil.

Jeff Kuhn of Action Printing was most helpful in providing advice on preparing the photographs for the printer. Angie Mies, Desktop Publisher at Marian College, designed the cover, which incorporates the official logo of the sesquicentennial.

Several students, past and present, assisted in preparing the manuscript. Ashley Bruckschen and Natalie Ogasawara typed portions of the text that were not available on disk. Sally Albertz identified appropriate photographs and background information on the Mark Harrison paintings that are reproduced among the illustrations, and Gayle Kiszely and Edie Birschbach assisted with the major task of editing and proofreading. And of course there would be no book at all without the sixteen authors whose work is represented here.

Finally, this book represents a community effort made possible through its funding as a part of the Fond du Lac sesquicentennial celebration. Generous contributions have been made by the Fond du Lac Public Library, through its Bernice and Robert Seefeld Fund, for which I thank Leslyn Shires, Director, by the members of the Fond du Lac County Historical Society, and by Marian College of Fond du Lac, through the efforts of President Richard I. Ridenour, M.D., and of Vice President for Academic Affairs Sheryl Ayala, who both have been consistently supportive of this project.

Whatever virtues this book possesses are the result of the combined efforts of the individual authors and the people listed above. While in such a collaborative work it might also be tempting to share the responsibility for any shortcomings that remain, its faults, I must confess, are the consequence of my own limitations as an editor.

Clarence B. Davis
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin
February 5, 2002

The "New House," Ceresco, Constructed 1847

Ceresco: Utopia in Fond du Lac County

Gayle A. Kiszely

Ceresco was an experiment in communal life led by idealists who believed that humankind's essential nature was progressive. The experiment lasted just over six years. It is common to dismiss the utopian experiments of the nineteenth century as failures and to emphasize their weaknesses. Ceresco has not been an exception.

There was no single reason for Ceresco's demise. Participants cited criticism of residents who did not have the proper philosophy upon entering the experiment, including residents who lacked a good work ethic or members whose monetary investment had priority over their ideals. Contemporary observers pointed to growing competition with Ceresco's neighbor, Ripon, which was established within three years of Ceresco's inception, and the commune's lack of a specific religious creed that might have emotionally united people.¹

A more recent theory, still less convincing, is that the women at Ceresco lost what emergent powers they had gained in the evolving domestic sphere of the early 1800s when they entered a unitary system. According to this interpretation, the women no longer had any decision-making authority over their own homes and kitchens. Dissatisfied, they influenced their husbands to abandon Ceresco.²

That Ceresco did not endure often is considered synonymous with failure. But was it a complete failure? Or were its successes simply overshadowed by its ultimate demise? Indeed, a belief in the progress of humankind implies a belief in a process. Communal life was a timely step in that process. Many of those who lived at Ceresco reaped lasting personal rewards and benefited monetarily from their participation.

Longevity is not the sole criterion of success. It is what transpired before the inevitable collapse and Ceresco's lasting legacy that determines success or failure. Ceresco's communal

¹ Isabella Town Hunter, Mrs. R. D. Mason, and Charlotte Haven, residents of Ceresco, and Warren Chase, primary founder and resident, offered specific reasons for Ceresco's demise. Their reasons are explored in this essay. Ada C. Merrill, "Reminiscences of Early Days," Interview with Isabella MacKay Town Hunter, *Ripon Commonwealth*, October 21, 1904, Wisconsin Phalanx Collection, State Historical Society of Wisconsin (SHSW); Interview with Mrs. R. D. Mason by S. J. Kidder, "Recollections of Early Settlers," 1906, Wisconsin Phalanx Collection, SHSW; Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, as reprinted in Samuel M. Pedrick, *A History of Ripon Wisconsin*, ed. George H. Miller (The Ripon Historical Society, 1964) 54; Warren Chase, Ceresco, October 1, 1849, in *Spirit of the Age*, Wisconsin Phalanx Collection, SHSW.

² John C. Savagian, "Women of Ceresco," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, v. 83, no. 4 (Summer, 2000) 261, 279.

philosophies of peace and harmony have been resurrected in the 150-year span since Ceresco's dissolution. The early 1900s, and more recently the 1960s, experienced resurgence in communal efforts.

Ceresco existed in the period identified as America's Age of Reform, roughly 1830 to 1860. The reform crusades were diverse, and the reasons behind the crusades were nearly as varied as the causes themselves. Many arose out of fear, fear of the swiftness with which the nation was growing, fear of the change in the nature of immigrants and their religions, and fear of a growing lower class who had the power to vote. These changes were perceived as a threat to the social order. The goal of many reformers was to "reshape the morality of the masses."³

Other reformers, whose philosophies encompassed the uplifting of the "morality of the masses," nevertheless fought for more socially beneficial causes. These activists fought under the banners of anti-prostitution and temperance, prodded for changes both in prison environments and in support for the mentally incompetent, and promoted education, i.e., public schools, universities, and lyceums, as a means for adults to learn and to discuss ideas. Some historians believe that a "heightened sense of the meaning of the American democratic experiment" lay behind all these churning social movements. And even if not a primary motive, faith in democratic ideals was certainly a catalyst for reform.⁴

It was into this regenerative environment that Charles Fourier's grand and theoretical philosophies arrived in the United States through an idealistic American student, Albert Brisbane. In 1828, when he was just 19, Brisbane traveled to Europe to study. He began to read and to be deeply affected by the "profound truths" espoused by Fourier and his "social science."⁵ Brisbane was particularly intrigued with Fourier's concept of "attractive industry." This concept addressed the economic and the social frustrations experienced historically by those on the bottom rung of the agrarian ladder and by those in the emerging industrial working class. Fourier theorized that labor could be organized in such a way as to dignify the laborer and the

³ C. S. Griffin, *The Ferment of Reform, 1830 -1860* (Arlington Heights, Illinois: AHM Publishing Corporation, 1967), 2.

⁴ Griffin, 2-4.

⁵ Carl J. Guarneri, *The Utopian Alternative: Fourierism in Nineteenth-Century America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 20-22, 26-29.

labor, thereby making it attractive. Brisbane convinced Fourier to tutor him, using monetary enticement. He became a Fourier disciple.⁶

Fourier's plans for harmonial conditions included unitary living, often referred to today as communal living. All would live in one large building, and all chores would be shared, thereby avoiding the inefficiency of the isolated family. His views for peaceful association did not involve any kind of Spartan existence. Indeed, his vision was nothing less than grandiose. His plans for dwellings, which he called phalansteries, resembled King Louis XIV's Palace of Versailles. Eventually, he believed, the world would be organized into over two million phalanxes.⁷

In 1842, Brisbane purchased a weekly front-page column in Horace Greeley's *New York Tribune*. His column became syndicated and was distributed to newspapers across the states and the territories, feeding the hungry reform intellect of many others who sought an alternative mode of living as a solution of the ills of industrializing society. Those Americans who jumped onto the Fourier bandwagon referred to themselves as Associationists.⁸

Paralleling the contemporary currents of frustration with the ills of society, availability of cheap and vast tracts of land energized the dissemination of ideas about ,and the popularity, of an alternative mode of living in America. Land west of the populated East Coast had been surveyed by the national government and put on the market. The Wisconsin Territory was part of that expanse offered for sale in the mid 1830s and 1840s.⁹

A Wisconsin group who resided in the Village of Southport (later renamed Kenosha) had formed the Franklin Lyceum in the early 1840s. The members came largely from the lower middle classes, including local professionals, tradesmen and shopkeepers. Some of the group's timely topics of discussion and experimentation included mesmerism and spiritualism.

C. Latham Sholes, editor of the *Southport Telegraph* and a member of the Lyceum, reprinted information on Fourier's communitarian philosophy and favorably commented on its virtues in his newspaper.¹⁰ The open-minded and reform-minded members of this group were

⁶ Guarneri, 28-30.

⁷ Guarneri, 17, 24, 133.

⁸ Guarneri, 32, 33, 95.

⁹ Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973, 1989), 142.

¹⁰ Chase, *Life Line of the Lone One; or Autobiography of The World's Child* (Boston: Bela Marsh, 1858), 112, 113, 165: Mesmerism, forerunner of hypnotism and accomplishment through positive thinking, was developed by Viennese physician Franz Anton Mesmer, who believed a fluid called animal magnetism flowed throughout the

drawn to Fourier's principles of association in late 1843. One of those members, Warren Chase, would be instrumental in putting those principles into practice at Ceresco.

Warren Chase was, in his own words, a "sufferer from competition and social ills" and became the "mental motive-power of the organization." His childhood of emotional and physical deprivation and his life of poverty up to his Ceresco years motivated his search for a more edifying mode of living.¹¹

Chase was born an illegitimate child in Pittsfield, New Hampshire in 1813. His mother died when he was four, and he later discovered that his father had been killed in the War of 1812. Orphaned, he became the "world's child" (Chase referred to himself as the "world's child" or the "Lone One" in his autobiography, written in the third person). Chase had no relatives with the means to take him in, leaving him at the mercy of New Hampshire's primitive early nineteenth-century child welfare system. For orphans like Chase, that often meant being sold into indentured servitude, and this was his fate.¹² When Chase turned twenty-one, he left New England for the opportunities that were opening up in the West. Eventually, his wanderings took him to Michigan, where he met and soon married the sister of a friend.¹³

On a promise of work, which turned out to be a scam, Chase moved to Southport, Wisconsin in 1838, wife and child in tow. Their early years in Southport (1838-1844) were their most destitute, but in Southport, sprouted the seeds of change in Chase's fortune and in his philosophies.¹⁴

The loss of his parents, a loveless childhood, and the death of two of his own children in Southport no doubt increased Chase's vulnerability to many of the nineteenth century experimental philosophies discussed in the Franklin Lyceum, including spiritualism. The stigma of Chase's illegitimacy on his mother and on him, coupled with his subsequent servitude, instilled

human body. Illness resulted when this fluid was out of balance. Mesmer passed a magnet or his hands over the ill, using his own excess animal magnetism to heal. Patients reportedly entered trances while the healing forces were entering them. Spiritualism was the belief that souls of the dead remained available to believers for communication and protection. Robert C. Fuller, "Alternative Medicine," in the *Encyclopedia of Social History* 1:2383, 2384; C. Latham Sholes is credited with inventing/perfecting the typewriter in 1869. He later sold the rights to E. Remington Company for \$12,000. Joseph Schafer, "The Wisconsin Phalanx," as printed in *The Wisconsin Magazine of History*, vol. XIX (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1935-1936), 461; *State of Wisconsin 1997-1998 Blue Book* (Wisconsin Legislative Reference Bureau, 1997), supplement 31.

¹¹ Chase, *Life Line*, 113, 114.

¹² Chase, *Life Line*, 13-20.

¹³ Chase, *Life Line*, 63.

¹⁴ Chase, *Life Line*, 86, 88.

in him empathy for the plight of the downtrodden. This included women and, later, slaves. He would maintain his convictions regarding spiritualism, women's rights, and slavery for the remainder of his life.

Chase, an avid member of the Lyceum, enthusiastically embraced Fourier's novel means to reorganize society.

Its vast economies, its harmony of groups and series, its attractive industry, its advantages for schools, meetings, parties and social festivities, all seemed to make its theory invulnerable to attack

According to Chase, the conversion from rhetoric to action came in response to taunts from critics, "Why not practise it, if you believe it the best way to live?" And so they did.¹⁵

The members of the Franklin Lyceum most interested in the Fourier experiment moved with proverbial lightning speed. The process, which began with a simple discussion in the fall of 1843, grew to fruition, all within six months. The Southport group, now calling themselves the Wisconsin Phalanx, had already appointed a Board of Directors and developed and adopted a constitution by March 1844.¹⁶

Consistent with Fourier's ideals for financing the organization, the Wisconsin Phalanx formed a joint stock company and sold shares for twenty-five dollars each. A 20% premium, payable in stock, served as an enticement to investors who paid in monies by April 30. A committee of three was appointed to find a suitable location with "water privileges."¹⁷

By mid-April, the land committee had returned to Southport with a favorable report of choice land in what is now the city of Ripon on the western edge of Fond du Lac County. The Board of Directors began organizing the teams and wagons, procuring a tent, and purchasing the provisions necessary for the first pioneers to proceed to the "domain," the name commonly used by members of the Wisconsin Phalanx to refer to its real estate holdings.¹⁸

On May 20, 1844, "nineteen men and one boy" began a journey "by the way of Watertown and the long prairie" to "the land of promise." Warren Chase, having the business of the deeds to handle, traveled alone by way of Milwaukee and Fond du Lac. He met the group at a

¹⁵ Chase, *Life Line*, 113, 114. Rather than continually distract the reader with the vagaries of nineteenth century spelling, the word 'sic' is omitted from all direct quotations.

¹⁶ Michael Frank Diary, 1/6/1844, 3/13/1844, Wisconsin Phalanx Collection, SHSW.

¹⁷ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 4/1/1844, 9/2/1844, Ripon Historical Society (RHS).

¹⁸ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 4/20/1844, 4/22/1844, RHS; Michael Frank Diary, 4/15/1844, SHSW; Chase, *Life Line*, 114, 115.

prearranged location and from there they continued together. They arrived on May 27 in the valley of their domain, which Chase named Ceresco in honor of the ancient Roman harvest goddess, Ceres. Other members arrived in the following months.¹⁹

Warren Chase described that first summer at Ceresco in his autobiography, *Life Line of the Lone One*. The men slept in tents and ate in the shade of trees. Their first order was to break the ground and to plant crops, one hundred acres of wheat, potatoes, corn and other vegetables. A late frost on June 10 took most of the corn and the beans.²⁰ The families of the first group arrived throughout the summer. The men quickly began to build permanent shelters that, though primitive, were enclosed before winter. Three buildings were built, each twenty feet by thirty feet, and one-and-one-half stories high. Chase described his family's quarters for their first winter on the domain as

one fourth of one floor in one of the dwellings, parted from the other three families by carpet and quilt partition, and from the out-doors by crooked oak clapboards through which light and snow could easily find entrance.

Seven other families lived in similar circumstances through that first winter, which was, according to Chase, fortunately a mild one.²¹

It is easy to imagine the urgency the settlers experienced in those first few months, tempered by optimistic enthusiasm. They were the first to settle in the township, and their survival substantially depended on their self-sufficiency. Those first three structures were built almost entirely without the benefit of a sawmill. Only the boards for the staircases and the upper floors were milled in Waupun, twenty-two miles from Ceresco. From oak trees on the land, the men shaped timbers for the frame and rough boards for the clapboards, the shingles, and the floors. They completed their own sawmill by winter, but by then the creek had frozen, ending any finishing work until spring, hence the quilt and carpet partitions.²²

The men commenced building the original "long home" or "long house" in the summer of 1845. They built it in sections. Each tenement was twenty feet wide. Eventually, twenty tenements were built, ten on a side, joined by a hallway to the other ten. This long home was a far cry from Fourier's vision of a structure resembling Versailles, but Chase described his

¹⁹ Michael Frank Diary, 5/20/1844, SHSW; Chase, *Life Line*, 116, 126.

²⁰ Chase, *Life Line*, 117.

²¹ Chase, *Life Line*, 117-119.

²² Chase, *Life Line*, 117, 118; Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, in Pedrick, 52-53.

tenement as “the most capacious house he had ever occupied in Wisconsin; having one room twelve feet square and a bed-room below, and two bed-rooms above” No space was allotted for kitchens in the tenements. True to the ideals of unitary living, all food was cooked in just one kitchen, and all initially ate at the common table.²³

Plans for a second dwelling house were proposed in the autumn of 1845. Two years later, after it was built, the council appointed a committee to review residents’ applications to live in it. This building, having undergone numerous renovations, still stands and is lived in after 150 years. In articles written subsequent to the experiment, this surviving building has been referred to as the “long house.” However, in the corporate journals, it is identified as the “new house,” “long house” being reserved for the original building, which is long since gone.²⁴

The Constitution of the Wisconsin Phalanx Association, adopted in March 1844, laid out the group’s organization and bylaws. This agreement, with a few minor changes, later was merged into and became the Act of Incorporation for the Wisconsin Phalanx Corporation, as passed by the Territorial government on February 6, 1845.²⁵

The Constitution called for an annual meeting of stockholders and members to be held the second Monday of every December, at which the yearly election of officers and nine councilmen took place. They formed a board of managers, most often simply called the council, who handled all business affairs of the Phalanx. In spite of the cumbersomeness of the rules in Ceresco’s Articles of Incorporation, there is a curious absence of records in which any member criticized the abundance of red tape.

The Wisconsin Phalanx was established deliberately as a nonsectarian association. Nevertheless, religion certainly played a role on the domain. The corporate agreement called for complete religious tolerance, thus insuring that each resident on the domain was “protected in his or her religious belief.” The bylaws forbade any unnecessary work on the Sabbath. There appears to have been a strong, fundamental belief in God as creator, but advocating any specific sectarian doctrine was strictly avoided.²⁶

²³ Chase, *Life Line*, 122.

²⁴ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 10/14/1845, 4/24/1848, RHS.

²⁵ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 2/14/1845, RHS.

²⁶ Wisconsin Act of Incorporation, Bylaws, Article III, Section 1. SHSW; Wisconsin Phalanx Act of Incorporation, Section 16, SHSW.

William Stilwell worked for the Association in the summer of 1846. In letters to his family in New York, he described the religious atmosphere on the domain, which included a variety of sectarian sermons held each week, typically Methodist or Baptist. According to Stilwell, unnecessary work on the Sabbath included hunting and fishing. He estimated the number of children at about fifty, so that his reader “may judge what kind of a sabbath School might be established.” He then offered a critical analysis of the school which was called a sabbath school but it is conducted in a most redeicolous manner. The child is requested to do nothing but recite one verse or two . . . and as soon as they have done this the Superintendent asks a few questions and requests them to sing and then goes home and the next school is conducted in the same way.

When it was Stilwell’s turn to be in charge of the Sabbath school, he tried to change what he considered to be an unsatisfactory situation by urging attendance and long lessons. Regardless of his criticism, Stilwell attested to “excellent times in prayer and class meeting,” claiming that “the former was not established when I arrived.”²⁷

Itinerant preachers sometimes held Sabbath services on the domain. In his memoirs, *Thirty Years in the Itinerancy*, one such preacher, Wesson G. Miller, wrote favorably about the members and the Association, but not the accommodations for preaching. The Reverend Miller remembered being “most hospitably entertained” and that even though some of the men were “professed infidels, they always received ministers gladly and treated them with consideration.”²⁸

Miller was complimentary of the organization. He noted that their living accommodations for each family provided “a parlor and one or more sleeping apartments. Here families were exclusive in their relations as good neighborhoods could well require.” He further commented approvingly on their progress in cultivating the land and in developing education for the youth. According to Miller, school in Ceresco was organized “early in the game and [was] excellent.”²⁹

Reverend Miller was less complimentary about the dining hall, which also served as the chapel in which he preached. According to Miller, the multi-purpose dining facility was long and narrow, the width barely enough for the table, a row of persons on each side and the free movement of the waiters behind them [I had to] throw . . . the message along the narrow defile. To me the task was exceeding disagreeable.

²⁷ William Stilwell letter, dated June 30, 1846, Fond du Lac County Historical Society (FCHS).

²⁸ Wesson G. Miller, excerpts from *Thirty Years in the Itinerancy* (1875), 51-52, SHSW.

²⁹ Miller, 51-52, SHSW.

My thin feminine voice seemed to spend its volume before it had reached the middle of the line.³⁰

Other traveling preachers were less open-minded and were appalled by the absence of regular observance of religious tradition in Ceresco. The Reverend Cutting Marsh, a Congregationalist minister, rode the circuit and recorded his travels and his visits in his journal. He visited Ceresco in 1850, very near the end of the association as it was originally organized. While he gave some credit to Ceresco for being temperate, as opposed to nearby Ripon, which was in its infancy and was more bibulous, he castigated Ceresco for its heathenism.³¹

Marsh had been told by Chase that many families regularly worshiped when they first moved to Ceresco, but that habit had eroded in time. Marsh concluded that the end of Ceresco was linked directly to the fading religiosity of its members.

It has here been shown that a community who discards the Christian religion, desecrates its Sabbaths by doing business on that day, running the public mills and making it a day of recreation also, cannot long hold together. It soon becomes a mere map of moral corruption too loathsome for their own endurance.³²

A broad view of the Associationists' religious philosophy was printed in *The Phalanx*, the Fourierist organ first published by Albert Brisbane in 1843. While Associationists were not averse to religion and while they believed the Scriptures were the word of God, they could "not set up any distinct theological creed," nor could "they rely upon mere religious enthusiasm in the propagation of reform." Their conclusion, that they knew not "which religion to adopt as exclusively in the possession of the truth," was parallel to Warren Chase's own religious opinions.³³

Criticism of the Wisconsin Phalanx for refraining from adopting a specific Christian creed was to be expected from evangelical preachers. Ironically, the lack of religion, not for its redemptive value but for its contribution to cohesion, has been cited as one reason for the association's dissolution.

Insights into the daily experiences of those on the domain survive through letters written mainly to loved ones and friends. These letters provide glimpses into the surrounding wilder-

³⁰ Miller, 51-52, SHSW.

³¹ Cutting Marsh Journal Entry, June 1850, SHSW; Fred L. Holmes, *Badger Saints and Sinners* (Milwaukee, E. M. Hale and Company, no date), 102, RHS.

³² Cutting Marsh Journal, June 13, 16, 1850, SHSW.

³³ Guarneri, 34; *The Phalanx: Organ of the Doctrine of Association*, v. 1:114, (New York, J. Winchester, 1844), 201, RHS.

ness, the Native Americans still in the area, the difficulty of travel, the physical location and the organization of the domain, and its social life. These insights are supplemented both by reminiscences of former residents and neighbors and by the minutes of the weekly council meetings recorded in a journal kept by the corporation. The few letters that remain hardly can be considered a representative sampling of the whole population, but they do offer valuable glimpses into individual experiences and opinions. Generally, the letters are upbeat.

Otis Capron arrived in Ceresco in February 1845. The following October, he wrote a letter to George Swington describing the abundant crops which included “some [of] the largest turnip and onion that I ever saw, they are powerfull no mistake . . . and a powerfull heap of potatoes and corn.” He continued in his letter to praise the abundance of wildlife. “[W]e live on the fat of land, no mistake—any quantity of game in these digings—Ducks Deers and wild gees”³⁴

William Stilwell’s letters to his family in New York in 1846 related the tale of his sixty-mile journey through sparsely settled territory from Sheboygan to Ceresco. Stilwell stayed his first night at a temperance house about six miles from Sheboygan. “[T]he next morning we started on it was raining at the time in a violent manner, but people in this country must not mind anything no matter what.”³⁵ They continued westward but soon arrived at

. . . a small piece of woodland out of which there was no getting for the spas of thirty five miles. Through the dismal swamp for such it was we waded our way through part the time in mud over the tops of my boots, this is a fact—and a part of the time in water which stood in the road – In this woods Oh! horrible, the Mischetoes are as thic as bees as big as a small Wasp and bite about as sharp.³⁶

Stilwell described the farms and the residences he saw as he journeyed. They ranged from log cabins to a hole dug into the side of a hill, “the whole of it would not exceed in size a small bedroom.” Stilwell also recounted that some settlers’ furniture consisted of sections of logs for chairs, a hollowed log for “a bread trough and [they] use the same for a cradle if need be.” He wanted it understood that all the people he described owned the land on which they

³⁴ Otis H. Capron to George Swington (excerpt), Ceresco, October 19 and 23, 1845, SHSW.

³⁵ William Stilwell to Sarah M. Stilwell, Ceresco, June 30, 1846, FCHS.

³⁶ William Stilwell to Sarah M. Stilwell, Ceresco, June 30, 1846, FCHS.

lived. He then described the “poor Indians who roam about from place to place begging as they go for bread to feed their starving children.”³⁷

Stilwell applied for work on the domain and was employed as a carpenter, for which he was paid a wage of nine or ten cents per hour. He felt that this was a good wage “for a stranger.”³⁸ In another letter, Stilwell spoke of his plans to return to New York in late summer. He intended to take to Maria “some shoes which are worn here by the ladies of fashion fixed up in real indian style.”³⁹

Benjamin and Louise Sheldon lived in Ceresco for several years, beginning in 1845. Benjamin wrote to his sister Abigail primarily of things relating to the crops and the gristmill. He wrote that, while the 1847 wheat crop was good, the corn suffered from a cold summer in which there was frost every month.⁴⁰

While Louise attested to liking the associative life, her letters to Abigail contain a hint of resignation. She admitted to homesickness, but having moved far from all relations, she expected that. “We must be content, for I find contentment is a greater fortune than riches.”⁴¹

Things became more difficult for Louise in the winter of 1847-48. Sheldon left for Janesville to teach school, and Louise was feeling “very gloomy and lonesome, alone amongst strangers although they are very kind My constitution has been broken for several years, likewise my mind with it.” She wrote that there were disputes in the association that winter but mentioned nothing specific in her letter. Louise then described the winter weather, the good fall harvest and the illnesses that had circulated that season.

The thermometer sunk as low as 26 degrees below zero. We had quite a snow storm New Years day. . . . There was some ague and fever here last fall but is quite healthy now except among the Indians. They are dying very fast. The Menomonie tribes are nearly all dead. The chief says they [will] only last two moons longer⁴²

Benjamin Sheldon may have left the domain in order to make some money. Cash was in short supply. What there was of it was used to purchase necessities from outside the domain. The members had little cash of their own. A resolution was passed in April 1846 stating that

³⁷ William Stilwell to Sarah M. Stilwell, Ceresco, June 30, 1846, FCHS.

³⁸ William Stilwell to Sarah M. Stilwell, Ceresco, June 30, 1846, FCHS.

³⁹ William Stilwell to Companion, Ceresco, July 29, 1846, FCHS.

⁴⁰ Benjamin Sheldon to Sister Abbie, October 1, 1847, copy of letter, SHSW.

⁴¹ Louise Sheldon to Sister Abigail, October 1, 1847, copy of letter, SHSW.

⁴² Louise Sheldon to Sister Abigail, Ceresco, January 28, 1848, copy of letter, SHSW.

any member of the Wisconsin Phalanx who shall leave the Domain and engage in business for his own interest and remain absent for 15 days without the consent of the Council shall . . . lose his membership . . . except by application and readmission.

Thereafter, requests for leaves of absence appeared in the weekly meeting notes. For example, James Hebden asked for four months leave to earn money “to supply my pressing wants.” John Limbert requested two or three months for the “necessity of working off the Domain for the purpose of procuring necessaries for myself and family.”⁴³

Charlotte and Harriet Haven, unmarried sisters from Portsmouth, New Hampshire, moved to Ceresco in the autumn of 1848. Charlotte wrote newsy letters with humorous anecdotes to her sister Hannah.⁴⁴ Charlotte frequently was interrupted while writing by visits from other domain residents. In one missive, Charlotte mentioned that she and Harriet were not attending the dancing party that night, but that earlier she had made eighteen apple pies, in addition to Mrs. Baker’s “about 100 cookies,” because they were on a committee assigned to provide for visitors who came to the domain for sociable events. “Alas! A knock on the door; it is Mr. Farmin.” Charlotte wrote another paragraph when, “Another knock, Mr. Baker. . . .” She continued writing when the two men settled in to play euchre. Another letter survives which Charlotte began on July 8, 1849 and continued a week later due to interruptions by visitors and by hot weather. She wrote one short paragraph and then noted that four callers had been there since she had resumed writing.⁴⁵

Charlotte and Harriet enjoyed the busy social schedule in Ceresco, especially “the society of the three Germans who pass at least two evenings a week with us.” They played whist, chess, and music. And Mr. Farmin offered to teach them German.⁴⁶

The sisters first lived in the original long building, which Charlotte described in detail.

It is 208 feet long, the rooms ten feet square, the hall five feet wide. The chambers extend half over the rooms and meet in the center of the hall. . . . I will introduce you to the hall. I only wish you could pass through it once, and if you could get through safely you might consider yourself lucky, and we should congratulate; for this building, having no cellar, and but a small closet under the stairway of each tenement . . . therefore this hall is used for both cellar and closet.

⁴³ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 4/16/1846, 12/21/1846, RHS.

⁴⁴ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 6/21/1848, RHS.

⁴⁵ Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848 in Pedrick, 51-54; Charlotte Haven to William Haven, Ceresco, July 8 and 13, 1849, RHS.

⁴⁶ Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, in Pedrick, 51-54.

. . . [Y]ou can walk but a few steps without stumbling against cupboards, wood boxes, flour barrels, bags of potatoes, pumpkins, etc., thus endangering toes, noses, or other prominent features, or perchance becoming ensconced in a pan of milk, or find yourself sprawling amid the contents of said barrels, bags and boxes. Light is admitted at doors at each end and cross halls, which are partly of glass, producing a sort of twilight, even at mid-day.⁴⁷

Charlotte wittily described the hallway at night, comparing it to a Mother Goose rhyme, ‘The cats and mice, they made such a strife.’ But instead of a wife, three stray cats hover up and down . . . in their pursuit of game . . . disturbing the slumber of the inmates of the respective tenements by the rattling down of dishes⁴⁸

Charlotte Haven recognized that among her fellow associationists “there is, of course a great variety” of character. As she saw them, many truly were interested in association and in the betterment of mankind. She described them as “an intelligent, well informed class of people . . . not much cultivation, but seem desirous of improvement.” There were others for whom she had less esteem. Her 1848 observation foreshadowed the events of the next few years.

Then there are others who had money-making as their object, and still seek their own interests. These grumble and are dissatisfied. There are others who are too lazy to work themselves, and thought when they came, to live easy and cheaply at the expense of others. With these the council is dissatisfied; and both the latter classes will soon leave.⁴⁹

In 1850, Charlotte Haven married Volney Mason, who had lived in Ceresco since the summer of 1844 and was a stockholder. He traded his shares in the Wisconsin Phalanx for nursery stock. Volney and Charlotte moved with their trees to land they had purchased near what is now Berlin, Wisconsin, a two hour ride north of Ceresco.⁵⁰

Harriet Haven left the domain in 1849 to teach school in St. Louis. She wrote a long letter to Charlotte in 1850, congratulating her on her marriage, but expressed sadness that her own tie to Ceresco now was broken. “[T]he hospitality and warmheartedness of the people . . . has left a lasting impression on my mind, which it is my delight to dwell upon.”⁵¹

Further removed in time from these letters are the reminiscences of early settlers that were recorded in the early 1900s, long after Ceresco’s demise. Along with sharing the lasting

⁴⁷ Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, in Pedrick, 51-54.

⁴⁸ Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, in Pedrick, 51-54.

⁴⁹ Charlotte Haven to Hannah, Ceresco, October 26 and 31, 1848, in Pedrick, 51-54.

⁵⁰ Charlotte Haven, Ceresco, January 5, 1850, completed February 13, 1850, in Pedrick, 55.

⁵¹ Harriet Haven to Charlotte Haven Mason, St. Louis, March 10, 1850, RHS.

impressions of their life on the domain, some former residents suggested reasons for the association's failure.

Isabella Town was a widow living in Milwaukee with her two young sons in 1844. She read the Wisconsin Phalanx bylaws and felt that the lifestyle in Ceresco would be much healthier for her boys than the intemperate atmosphere of the city. She moved to Ceresco in June of that year. A year later, she married Nathan Hunter, a charter member.⁵²

Isabella Town Hunter had been in charge of a public house in Canada with her first husband. She credited her experience there as the basis for her being made "head manager of the dining room and culinary department" which she also designated the women's department.⁵³ Hunter proclaimed, "Those were among the happiest days of my life. We were like brothers and sisters, living together in the sweetest harmony, and the friendships of those days have lasted through all the years." Hunter recalled the social events held in the evenings; dancing parties on Fridays, lectures, debates, singing school and other festive events. Ceresco member David Dunham, "quite a famous fiddler," played for the dances.⁵⁴

Hunter faulted Warren Chase for allowing some to join who did not possess the proper philosophy and work ethic. She asserted that he placed greater emphasis on quantity than on quality, especially for later applicants. Their laziness increased the workload of the truly industrious.⁵⁵

The idealist in Warren Chase would have disagreed. In an 1847 letter, he admitted that, while the Phalanx required a greater financial investment for admittance than was required at its inception, money alone was not the prerequisite. An applicant must be devoted to "the cause, ready to endure for it hardships, privations and persecutions. . . . [N]one but practical working-men need apply, for idlers can not live here."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, predicated on Haven's and Hunter's observations, it is probable that lack of money precluded the admission of some

⁵² Merrill, "Reminiscences of Early Days," SHSW.

⁵³ Merrill, "Reminiscences of Early Days." SHSW. The women's department would have been the Domestic group. The elected head of the formal committee was always a man; however, Hunter's claim to be manager without the official elected title is probably more accurate in terms of the actual labor done.

⁵⁴ Merrill, "Reminiscences of Early Days," SHSW.

⁵⁵ Merrill, "Reminiscences of Early Days," SHSW.

⁵⁶ Letter from Warren Chase as printed in John Humphrey Noyes, *History of American Socialisms* (Philadelphia: Lippincott, 1870), excerpts in the Wisconsin Phalanx Collection, SHSW

applicants who might have worked hard. Conversely, it is equally probable that, if cash was a pressing need within the association, deficits in devotion would be overlooked.

Like Isabella Hunter, Mrs. R. D. Mason was a single woman when she visited her sister in Ceresco in 1848. There she met and later married Robert Mason, who had lived in Ceresco since 1845. Mrs. Mason reiterated the Haven sisters' and Hunter's points of view in her recollections regarding the sociability that pervaded the atmosphere in Ceresco. Mrs. Mason also recalled attending weekly lyceums for discussing "various subjects and measures of public or common interest."⁵⁷

From Mrs. Mason's perspective, several factors contributed to the association's dissolution. One was the opportunity for wealth and adventure that arose from the discovery of gold in California and the ensuing rush in 1849. But Mrs. Mason's definitive opinion held that, because of the hope for profit from Wisconsin real estate, the "spirit of speculation was what broke up the phalanx."⁵⁸

The *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal* supplies a record of the motions and the resolutions of the weekly council meetings, although the discussions producing them are lost to history. It is apparent from these records that the leaders were attempting to improve and to refine their original bylaws, and that they were addressing issues and problems that arose from living in close proximity with other humans.

As reported in the Haven letters and in the Hunter reminiscences, not all members lived up to the association's expectations. In 1845, a resolution was passed that the secretary would notify Mr. Babcock that thereafter he would have to pay for his and his family's board weekly and that the Phalanx "would not receive pay for their board and rent . . . in labor [from Babcock after November 1]."⁵⁹

Despite the original plan for unitary living, there appeared to be a need for having some space of one's own to assert one's individuality. A number of resolutions were approved in order to meet this desire. After March 1846, the families in the long building had "the privilege of extending their yards 40 feet" and they also could keep their wood in their yards.⁶⁰ All residents originally boarded at the common table. Eventually, some families, desirous of privacy

⁵⁷ Interview with Mrs. R. D. Mason, SHSW.

⁵⁸ Interview with Mrs. R. D. Mason, SHSW.

⁵⁹ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 9/29/1845, RHS.

⁶⁰ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 3/23/1846, RHS.

and the family unit, chose to board by themselves.⁶¹ A resolution passed in April 1847 implied an accommodation for those providing their own board. Private garden space, two rods square, would be provided to, oddly enough, any male member over 21 years of age. A council member was assigned to stake out the plots and to recommend an appropriate rental price.⁶²

Some of the resolutions addressed minutiae, reinforcing the argument that Ceresco died partially under the burden of its own weight. Everyday occurrences, for which actions and decisions would be otherwise a matter of course, had to be decided by the council.

This readily becomes obvious from a sampling of the resolutions:

1. In November, 1844, it was resolved that one bushel of ears of corn or one bushel of oats be fed to each team of horses per day.⁶³
2. In 1846, a resolution passed, instructing Benjamin Sheldon “to take care of the school boys and teach them and discipline those who are old enough in labor and in swimming and other play . . . and to keep a book in which he records his time”⁶⁴
3. Another resolution declared the “foreman of the horse teams be instructed not to let the horse teams to individuals to take pleasure rides on Sunday.”⁶⁵
4. Yet another 1846 resolution charged the secretary to be responsible for distributing boots “to the members according to their need.”⁶⁶
5. In 1847 it was “resolved that the agent in the kitchen be and hereby is instructed to get breakfast at 6 a.m. and supper at 6 p.m. until otherwise ordered.”⁶⁷

Adolescent misconduct, then as now, required control measures. A committee was appointed to devise a plan “for the middle size and aged boys for their better advancement in industrial employment and exercise for to prevent their mischievous and dangerous depredations frequently committed by them on the domain.”⁶⁸

That the reorganization of the Wisconsin Phalanx was deemed necessary and that changes were imminent is apparent from entries in the corporate journal and in Chase’s letters to

⁶¹ Warren Chase, “Annual Statement for the Condition and Progress of the Wisconsin Phalanx, for the fiscal year ending December 1, 1845,” as excerpted in Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 419, SHSW; *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 10/6/1845, RHS; Chase, *Life Line*, 123.

⁶² *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 4/19/1847, RHS.

⁶³ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 11/2/1844, RHS.

⁶⁴ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 7/13/1846, RHS.

⁶⁵ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 9/8/1846, RHS.

⁶⁶ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 10/26/1846, RHS.

⁶⁷ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 3/22/1846, RHS.

⁶⁸ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 7/29/1848, RHS.

various publications in late 1849 and in 1850. Still, there appears to have been optimism for Ceresco, based upon its reorganization. As Charlotte Haven Mason prepared to leave Ceresco with her new husband, she wrote that the amendment which allowed the land to be sold evidently provided stockholders “great satisfaction The society there is changing very rapidly and I think is much improved.”⁶⁹

Beginning in June 1849, resolutions passed in the council foretold the impending dissolution of the commune as it originally was organized by providing for the disposition of private property. A committee oversaw the sale of cows to individuals. Arrangements were made to rent the boarding house and the bakery. The real estate of the Phalanx was subdivided into building lots and farms and the property appraised.⁷⁰ In the spring of 1850, the association officially became the Village of Ceresco.⁷¹

During this transitional time, Chase wrote a letter to *The Spirit of the Age*, a weekly journal for Associationists, in which he appealed for like-minded reformers to join him and to begin anew in Ceresco with a slightly more practical plan of operation.

Now brethren if you wish to contribute your efforts, and to build up by degrees slowly but surely a beautiful society, each living upon his own resources and on his own homestead, and cooperating by voluntary effort in all the various steps necessary to fit, educate and prepare for the unitary life, here is the place, and now, or the coming winter and spring the time.⁷²

In the same letter, Chase listed several specific reasons for the Phalanx’s reorganization. More than half of the stock was held by non-residents, “much of which has been bought and sold in various bartering speculative operations [by those] who buy and sell to get gain and have no sympathy with reforms.” He claimed that those more interested in money knew that the land was worth more if it was divided into parcels and therefore they pushed for the subdivision.⁷³

In addition, the price of land was rapidly rising, some investors realizing 25 per cent to 50 per cent profit. And the government had purchased more land from the Native Americans just north of Ceresco, which would attract more settlers and more speculation.⁷⁴

⁶⁹ Charlotte Haven Mason, January 5, 1850, completed February 13, 1850 in Pedrick.

⁷⁰ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 6/4/1849, RHS.

⁷¹ *Wisconsin Phalanx Journal*, 4/16/1850, SHSW.

⁷² Chase, Ceresco, October 1, 1849, printed in *The Spirit of the Age*, SHSW.

⁷³ Chase, *The Spirit of the Age*, October 1, 1849, SHSW.

⁷⁴ Chase, *The Spirit of the Age*, October 1, 1849, SHSW.

Chase blamed a “fundamental error” in the Phalanx Constitution for those speculative problems. The provision for one fourth of the yearly profit to be added to the capital brought “the souls . . . of men and women in competition with dollars and cents, and [established] a spirit of speculation . . . detrimental to true progress in social reform”⁷⁵

Indeed, the Wisconsin Phalanx did show a profit at each year’s end. The 1845 annual statement reflected an increase in assets of \$8,136.04, of which one fourth was credited to capital, a return of 12 per cent. In 1846, the return was 6 per cent, in 1847, 7¾ per cent, and in 1848 the dividend to stock was 6¼ per cent.⁷⁶

Part of the Ceresco reorganization included an attempt to widen its focus, and thereby the options for members. In 1849, some of the members built a cooperative store. Ownership of a share entitled the holder to purchase goods at cost. No one was allowed to own more than one share and because of the speculation experienced in the first endeavor, no dividend would be applied to the capital.⁷⁷ Ceresco’s store lasted only one year. The cumulative impact of non-members’ speculative investment in Phalanx stock and the manifestation of profit were too difficult to overcome. In Chase’s words, “Now all the reformers of Ceresco joined, and sang one song, and parted.”⁷⁸ Despite Chase’s poetic resignation, many Ceresco residents, including Chase, purchased lots and stayed in the area at least for a short time.

Chase’s epitaph for Ceresco characterized the social experiment as an organism, and he described the death of the Phalanx as the result of a

lingering fever [Ceresco] grew and flourished, and controlled the town for several years, until it ‘took sick,’ first of chills and fever, and finally of severe fever, which weakened its vital powers, until in 1850 it died, quietly and resignedly, having reigned six years triumphantly, and put all enemies under its feet, by its justice and honor. [Ceresco] owned a large farm, which was divided among its children, greatly improving their estates and leaving all but the Lone One better than it found them.⁷⁹

Chase, the “Lone One,” exaggerated his own misfortune. The long house was divided into sections and deeded out, much like a modern townhouse development. He took possession

⁷⁵ Chase, *The Spirit of the Age*, October 1, 1849, SHSW.

⁷⁶ Chase, Reports of annual statements 12/1/1845, 12/7/1846, 12/6/1847, 12/4/1848, printed in Noyes, *History of American Socialisms*, 420-440, SHSW.

⁷⁷ Warren Chase to Friend Densmore, Ceresco, June 20, 1849, printed in *The Oshkosh True Democrat*, June 29, 1849; Chase, *The Spirit of the Age*, November 13, 14, 1849, SHSW.

⁷⁸ Chase, *Life Line*, 128, 129.

⁷⁹ Chase, *Life Line*, 126.

of one of the dwelling units and of additional land in Ceresco. Indeed his experiences in Ceresco occasioned the debut of his political life, his involvement in the Wisconsin Constitutional Conventions in 1846 and 1847. Chase was elected to the Wisconsin Senate and later was nominated as candidate for governor by the Free-Soilers.⁸⁰

Chase's Ceresco era was also the beginning of his nationwide lecture tours. He continued on the lecture circuit throughout his life, advocating his odd mix of reform ideas, spiritualism, phrenology, temperance and women's rights.⁸¹

Conflict between the original Ceresco residents, who had first settled the township and desired to maintain their alternative life-style, and those newcomers, who desired to make Ripon the principal settlement, led to further erosion of Ceresco. Early in its emergence as a community, Ripon offered residents creature comforts denied in Ceresco, including local merchants and a public house that served liquor. By 1851, Ripon had grown to include a furniture factory and a woolen goods factory.⁸²

The difficulty of adjusting to unitary life, including eating at the common table and working on a common farm under Fourier's "attractive labor" plan, was a significant factor in Ceresco's dissolution. Unitary living was more appealing and plausible in theory than it was in actuality. The sheer cumbersomeness of associative decisions, the meetings, and the resolutions necessary for the most mundane matters had to have been tedious to even the most dedicated Associationist.

A recent argument holds that the women of Ceresco, particularly married women, lost what little power they had gained in prior years within the emerging domestic sphere, and this led to Ceresco's demise. The "separate domestic sphere" was the result of industrialization that had begun in the early decades of the 1800s. Earlier, both men and women worked primarily at home. While there existed a division of labor based on gender, many tasks traditionally executed by either gender were interdependent with tasks performed by the other. With the advent of industrialization, men began to work in the mills or factories. From this social change, the idea evolved that women belonged in the home and should provide a safe and moral haven.⁸³

⁸⁰ Chase, *Life Line*, 138, 139; Abstract of Title, A part of Lot One, Block Four, Ceresco Plat, City of Ripon, Wisconsin; 1850 Plat of the Village of Ceresco, RHS.

⁸¹ Chase, *Life Line*, 170.

⁸² Mapes, 74, SHSW.

⁸³ Ruth Schwartz Cowan, *More Work for Mother* (New York: Basic Books, 1983), 20, 26; Savagian, 279.

There is not, however, sufficient evidence to support this theory with regard to Ceresco. The degree of development of the women's sphere varied greatly from region to region. In addition, adjustments and modifications were necessary for the survival of anyone as far removed from an industrial economy as were the Ceresco residents. Any loss of decision-making power that was gained through the development of the spheres was not limited to the women who moved to communes, but was experienced by any woman settling on the frontier. Most of Wisconsin in the 1840s was decidedly frontier territory. Nearly all of the residents of Ceresco suffered from the loss of individual freedom and power as a result of unitary life. The evidence does not support a gender-based case for attributing Ceresco's demise to the unhappiness of women. Rather, the evidence simply suggests the difficulties of unitary life in general.

The loss of power and freedom necessarily applied to the men of Ceresco as well as to the women. This is evident given the resolutions cited earlier which addressed the most minute issues. Many of the men's decisions were controlled as well. For example, consider the items cited earlier regarding the number of ears of corn or buckets of oats to be fed to the horses per day and regarding permission from the council being required before any man could leave the domain for an extended period of time.

Furthermore, loss of control was not universal for women at Ceresco. From the letters of Charlotte and Harriet Haven, it appears that some may have gained greater freedom. Unmarried women could enjoy the freedom both of having male visitors in their rooms and of having an active and liberated, if proper, social life.

Did Ceresco ultimately fail? Its critics who emphasized its internal problems, its radical philosophies and its short lifespan would have us focus solely on the commune's brief existence. That Ceresco ended is not indicative of the failure of its ideals, nor does it make the labors of its members futile. Ceresco was simply a step in a process in which many of its members believed, namely, the progress of humankind. And many came away the better for having participated in the Ceresco experiment.

Those who invested money into Ceresco, believers and otherwise, benefited from its leaders' conservative financial management and from the appreciation in value of the real estate. Others gained intangible benefits. It is worthwhile to reiterate the views of those who lived in Ceresco. Isabella Town Hunter, who came to Ceresco a widow with two young boys and

married again while she was there, remembered her time there as “among the happiest days of my life . . . and the friendships of those days have lasted through all the years.” The letters from Harriet Haven to Charlotte Haven, written after Harriet had moved, testify to a longing for a part of her life she had left behind. “[T]he hospitality and warmheartedness of the people . . . has left a lasting impression on my mind, which it is my delight to dwell upon.”⁸⁴ Finally, Fannie Estella Blakely, the woman born in 1852 to an early Ceresco resident, wrote that she “lived near enough to those significant . . . years of the Community’s life to fall heir to its traditions and ideals, [and] to be vitally touched by its large humanitarianism.”⁸⁵

Ceresco’s existence as a commune was transitory. Ceresco as a humanitarian experience was not. It provided enduring memories for some. For others, it provided a foundation from which to move forward.

⁸⁴ Harriet Haven to Charlotte Haven Mason, St Louis, March 10, 1850, RHS; Merrill, “Reminiscences of Early Days,” SHSW.

⁸⁵ Fannie Estelle Blakely to Samuel Pedrick, May 22, 1919, SHSW.

Reverend James B. Rogers

Fond du Lac's Black Community and Their Church, 1865-1943

Sally Albertz

As early as 1619, Dutch ships arrived on the coast of North America carrying a cargo consisting of the first people from Africa destined to be sold into slavery in what would become the United States. It is estimated that, by 1865, Europeans had brought almost a half-million Africans to the shores of the new country.¹

Even before the Civil War ended, slaves made their way to the North to what many of them believed would be their new freedom. As the “Contrabands” moved into the Northern states, those Americans living there confronted what was to become for them an overwhelming problem: What should be done with the arriving refugees?² Many were not skilled in any sort of labor or industry, and many had served the same owner for years. They had not been allowed to learn to read or write, although a few had done so in secrecy. Where were they to go and what would they do to earn a living? Wisconsin was one of the states to open its doors to the newly freed African-American people.

This influx from the South was, however, not the first time that black people had come to Wisconsin. Records show that much earlier there were a number of blacks enlisted as boat-men, guides, and trappers, as well as interpreters. As the French fur traders entered the lands that would become Wisconsin in the early 1800s, blacks accompanied them, and black people were living in Prairie du Chien, Calumet and Outagamie Counties long before Wisconsin became a state. A census of the Michigan Territory taken in 1835, including Wisconsin, shows ninety-one African-Americans listed. Twenty-seven blacks in that census were noted as slaves, most of whom were owned by Southern officers stationed at Fort Crawford, located above the mouth of the

¹ Zachary Cooper, *Black Settlers in Rural Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1977), 4.

² Frazar Kirkland, *Anecdotes and Incidents of the War of the Rebellion* (Hartford: Hartford Publishing, 1866), 102. When Colonel Malory, a Confederate, demanded (under a flag of truce) the return of his escaped slaves under the Fugitive Slave Law, General Benjamin Butler stated that this sort of property “ought not to be regarded as *contraband*?” This supposedly was the origin of the term and became common when discussing ex-slaves.

Wisconsin River at Prairie du Chien.³ By 1840, the census reveals that Wisconsin held 185 free blacks and eleven slaves, but ten years later, in 1850, there were no slaves and 635 free blacks. By 1860, the number of free blacks in Wisconsin had climbed to 1,171. Between 1860 and 1870, the number of blacks in all Northern states almost doubled, and by 1870, Wisconsin had 2,113 individual blacks listed in the census.⁴

During the Civil War, the 14th Wisconsin Volunteers consisted of men from the Fond du Lac area. The Chaplain for Company A of the Regiment was Reverend J. B. Rogers, a minister of the Baptist faith, who had served the people of Fond du Lac for a number of years. Reverend Rogers became ill, and the army reassigned him to Cairo, Illinois to gather clothing, seed, and farm implements for the poor blacks who had migrated to the area. The kindly minister was instrumental in bringing a group of former slaves to the Fond du Lac area.

Reverend Rogers lived and worked in the Contraband Camp in Cairo from the autumn of 1862 until spring of 1863, and it seems that during this time he developed great compassion for the former slaves.⁵ Cairo is located at the junction of the Ohio and Mississippi Rivers at the southern tip of Illinois. From the beginning of the Civil War, it had been a major supply depot for the Union, especially since it was the final stop for the Illinois Central Railroad. Built on a peninsula, with a levee surrounding the town, Cairo had a population of almost 7,000 in 1863. Because the city was below the level of the two great rivers, steam-powered pumps were constantly at work, removing water from the town.⁶

Cairo was noted for its mud and for its thousands of rats. Reverend Rogers noted that the mud had a “wonderful tenacity—takes you deep down and holds you fast!” In regard to the rats, he stated that they were everywhere, even in parlors, where they left unmistakable signs they had visited.⁷ It was into this terrible situation that hundreds of Contrabands made their way. Within Cairo was the Freedman’s School, in which Reverend Rogers served and that had the goal of educating the newly freed blacks. Rogers

³ Cooper, 3.

⁴ Cooper, 4.

⁵ Rev. J. B. Rogers, *War Pictures, Experiences and Observations of a Chaplain in the U.S. Army in the War of the Southern Rebellion* (Chicago: Church & Goodman, 1863), 211.

⁶ Rogers, 212-213.

⁷ Rogers, 214.

discovered that they were quick to learn, and that they had never formed the habit of swearing. He marveled that twenty memorized the alphabet their first day in school and felt that they could learn as easily as white children; therefore he supported educating the blacks. He also found that they responded to religion easily. Classes started with sixty blacks, and by the time Reverend Rogers left, over 400 people had been taught in the school.⁸

Knowing the background of Reverend Rogers and his sympathy for black people, it should not be surprising that he would help a group of them make their way to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. Newspaper articles of the day noted that, as a great crowd of people congregated at the train depot, a “car-load” of ex-slaves arrived at the Fond du Lac depot, chaperoned by Reverend Rogers. Word had spread throughout the area that anyone who wanted to “engage a contraband” or to help in any way should be at the depot. After the excitement had died down, local women served the weary travelers a welcome meal. They were then given rooms at the American Hotel until they could be hired out.⁹ The \$4,000 American Hotel, located on the corner of Main and Court Streets, was a three-story wooden building containing forty-five bedrooms.¹⁰ Reverend Rogers went back to his Civil War unit as a chaplain after he delivered the Contrabands to Fond du Lac. He died a short time later, in 1863.¹¹

The newspaper article that described the ex-slaves’ arrival stated that, while the black arrivals were “timid,” they should not be alarmed at the ways of the North. The author also made it clear that this was a temporary situation, intended to last only until their masters were subdued. Then the former slaves would return to their “more congenial clime.” From this statement one may infer that many in the North truly believed that the black population would not remain, but would return to the South when the war was over. Many Fond du Lac men were fighting a war because of opposition to slavery, yet racial attitudes against having a black population in Fond du Lac were common. At this time, Fond du Lac County boasted a population of 10,000, of whom 8,090 lived within the city.

⁸ Rogers, 215-218.

⁹ “The Contrabands,” *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, October 1862.

¹⁰ *The History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880).

¹¹ “Four Former Slaves In City Recall Days of Bondage And Elder Rogers Movement,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 1924.

A few days later, an article in the same newspaper noted that there were approximately seventy-five men, women, and children who had arrived at the railway depot a few nights before, and that most of them came from plantations located in Franklin County, Alabama. The author believed that the Contrabands were doing nothing more than exchanging a Southern master for a Northern master. The news article stated that people should “take and use them—give them compensation as you see fit—if you abuse them the government will take them away and give them to someone else.” The article accused the Democrats of trying to make political “capital” out of the incident.¹² With a Republican President, Abraham Lincoln, in office, the Democrats seized any problem regarding the ex-slaves to discredit him.

Within a week, all but twenty of the former slaves had found employment and families for whom they could work. The twenty that remained wanted to keep their families together, and they had a more difficult time finding someone who could afford to hire the entire family.¹³

An account of the former slaves’ experiences, based on oral testimony of a participant, has survived. Zona Gale, a Portage, Wisconsin author who won many awards for her writing, wrote an article for the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* in October 1933. In her article, Gale explained that Reverend Rogers was her great uncle. Her article resulted from a visit to Fond du Lac that she had made with the son of Reverend Rogers, the Reverend Mr. James Linius Rogers of Chicago. The pair had come to Fond du Lac to explore the possibility that someone might remember Reverend Rogers or the location of the old Baptist Church. They visited the home of Mrs. Frances Shirley, one of the ex-slaves whom Reverend Rogers had brought to Fond du Lac.

Mrs. Shirley remembered Reverend Rogers well, and she explained that, while they were in Cairo, army chaplains were asked to write home to see if their communities would accept a number of the ex-slaves. Mrs. Shirley believed that the “city fathers” in Fond du Lac stated they would be able to find work for 150 Contrabands.

She recollected that there were some people in Fond du Lac who resented blacks being brought into the community. One night, someone threw a rock through the

¹² “Arrival of Contrabands,” *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, no. 3, October 1862, 1.

¹³ “Contraband Electioneering,” *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, 10, no. 4, October 1862.

Reverend Rogers' window, and it fell between the Reverend and his wife as they lay sleeping. This incident apparently troubled Mrs. Shirley enough to remain in her memory, despite the passage of many years. Perhaps it had made her aware for the first time that racial tensions had not been left behind when she boarded the railroad car that brought her to the North.¹⁴

A number of years before Reverend Rogers brought the seventy-some Contrabands to Fond du Lac, Joshua Goss apparently served as an agent for the Underground Railroad.¹⁵ His land, according to the 1862 plat map, lay west of Fond du Lac along what is now Highway 23, and it consisted of 40 acres in Section 8, and the same amount in Section 9.¹⁶ Joshua brought a few of the black families to his farm, where he built log cabins for them and tried to find them work, but he depleted his own meager fortune to the point that, at his death, he was penniless.¹⁷

Reverend Rogers' contingent was only a small part of the large movement of ex-slaves to the Northern states. In September 1862, the Commander of the Cairo District, Brigadier General J. M. Tuttle, notified the Secretary of War that a substantial number of black women and children were going to be sent to the North by General Grant. That group consisted of wives and children of ex-slaves whom Grant employed in the army that he commanded. There was widespread concern among Northerners that the blacks would take jobs vacated by husbands, brothers, and sons who were serving as Union soldiers. Many believed that the black population should be left in the South, not only to help the Union soldiers, but also to farm the land vacated by their former masters.¹⁸

By the early 1870s there were two other large Negro communities in Wisconsin: Pleasant Ridge, in Grant County near Lancaster, and Cheyenne Valley, located in northeastern Vernon County. Through a lack of employment, open racial hostility, or total indifference by the white population, the Contrabands found that the North did not

¹⁴ "Noted Author Visits City, Writes of Experiences In Tracing Family's History," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, Oct 13, 1933, 3.

¹⁵ Bill Hooker, "Fond du Lac, Its Sawmills and Freedmen-A Sketch," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* v. 16, no. 1 (September 1932), 425.

¹⁶ Sally Powers Albertz, Index to the 1862 Map of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin (Fond du Lac County Historical Society).

¹⁷ Bill Hooker, "Fond du Lac, Its Sawmills and Freedmen-A Sketch," *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* v. 16, no. 1 (September 1932), 425-426.

¹⁸ "Sending Negro Women and Children North" *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, September 1862, 3.

particularly welcome them, and as a result their numbers soon dwindled in most communities in Wisconsin.¹⁹

As these African-Americans settled into their new life in Fond du Lac, they evolved into a tightly knit community. They lived in a small area, close to each other, centered on West Twelfth Street. Mrs. Shirley, the last of the former slaves to live in Fond du Lac, gave an idea of what those first years were like for the former slaves during an interview.²⁰ Her husband, Charles Shirley, started the first prayer meeting. It was held in a private residence, that of Billy Jones, on Morris Street, sometime during 1863. During 1865, an unnamed man came to the Fond du Lac church from Michigan, bringing \$200 from his previous church. These funds were used in starting the Fond du Lac branch of the church conference.

During the time that they were using private homes for church services, the city of Fond du Lac offered the “little white court house” for a temporary place of worship. Mrs. Shirley explained that this building was located on the same spot where Court House park is located today. The black community used this facility for two years. During that time, money was donated by people in the Fond du Lac area in order to help the group build a church. One of the largest contributors was Mr. Pettibone and his son, who owned Pettibone’s Dry Goods, located on the corner of Forest Avenue and Main Street. Mr. Pettibone had made his fortune from eleven dry good stores located in various Wisconsin towns. Having made his fortune, he moved to the Fond du Lac area and settled there permanently.²¹

Land records at the Fond du Lac County Court House show that the first piece of property bought by the ex-slaves for a church was in 1868, a purchase from Colwert K. Pier and Kate Pier, his wife.²² The Pier family were among the first group of settlers in the Fond du Lac area. Colwert K. Pier, son of the original settler, and his wife probably received the land on a patent from the U.S. Government. The trustees, representing their church, the First Union Freedman Society of Fond du Lac, consisted of Washington Lindsley, Washington Skinner, William Jones, William Ruglan, and Lewis Ruglan. The

¹⁹ Robert C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin*, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985), 436-438.

²⁰ Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

²¹ Karen Padley, “Pettibone’s Was Once Hub of Downtown Area” *Fond du Lac Times*, April 27, 1977, 2.

²² Fond du Lac, Wisconsin Register of Deeds, Land Records, January 10, 1868, v. 49, 540.

piece of land that they purchased was sold to them for \$300, and they went to O.C. Steenburg to borrow the money to pay for it. They put up their land, lot 64 in the Pier Addition, for collateral. The land was located next to the East Branch of the Fond du Lac River. Actually it was almost in the river, because it was basically swampland. Lot 64 was and is located on the west side of the Fond du Lac River. There was no access to it, except by crossing the river from West Eleventh Street.

The church building itself had to be built on stilts.²³ A pencil sketch, drawn by an unknown artist, can be found in a scrapbook at the Adams House Resource Center, the research facility of the Fond du Lac County Historical Society. Mrs. Shirley explained that when the river became high, it usually washed away the bridge leading to the church, so they could not have services until the waters receded. The first year the bridge was swept away, the city came to their rescue, donating \$40 to rebuild the bridge. The following spring the bridge was again washed away, and needless to say, the city did not donate any more money to rebuild the bridge.²⁴

To build their first church, the group had to go through other people's property to gain access to their land. During Mrs. Shirley's interview, she acknowledged that the lot was purchased from Colonel Pier, but that he did not want to give them the deed for lot 64. To get the deed, Judge Griffin had to "stand good" for the church to get it. She further stated that "Judge Griffin was the man who went to law with Colonel Pier" to obtain the deed.²⁵

On April 21, 1887, E. B. Ingram and his wife Nancy, sold lot 41, Pier's Addition, to the Trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Fond du Lac. Anderson Reece, Peter Johnson, and Louis Gaines were listed as trustees on the deed. This lot was also located on West Eleventh Street but it was on the east side of the river, high and dry.²⁶ Soon after, on July 14, 1888, the three trustees sold the old swampy lot to Peter Johnson, one of the trustees, for \$30.²⁷ Descendants of Peter Johnson eventually

²³ Ruth Shaw Worthing, *The History of Fond du Lac County As Told By Its Place Names* (Oshkosh: Globe Printing, 1976).

²⁴ Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

²⁵ Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

²⁶ Fond du Lac Register of Deeds, Land Records, April 21, 1887, v. 96, 291.

²⁷ Fond du Lac Register of Deeds, Land Records, July 14, 1888, v. 138, 220.

lost the land through non-payment of taxes, and, in 1951, it was purchased by a neighbor for \$10.00.

During June 1919, a local land speculator, Joseph P. Goebel, bought ten pieces of land at public auction for the sum of \$16.40. This was the total amount owed for back taxes on these plots. Among those listed was Lot 41, where the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Fond du Lac had built their church in 1887. In April 1922, Goebel sold the land back to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church for the amount of \$9.30. That is probably the amount they had owed in back taxes.²⁸ What happened in the years between 1919, when Goebel bought the lot, and 1922, when he sold it back to the Church? Were they allowed to use the building for services? Were they required to pay rent? These questions will probably never be answered.

Revival meetings, as well as prayer meetings, were a common occurrence, and these activities were duly reported in the local newspapers.²⁹ During an interview, “Uncle Billy,” William Jones, one of the church trustees, told the newspaper reporter that “some of the people had religion so hard that it took four men to hold them down and keep them from break-ing everything in the house.”³⁰ The black community also held debates at the Opera Hall, collecting admission to benefit their church. During March 1879, the charge of admission was fifteen cents to “gain entrance to the scene of logic and music.”³¹

The church members were not without financial problems, and this fact was liberally stated in the newspapers of the day. During March 1879, they tried to collect money to pay off a debt of \$329.50. Their minister was able to collect only \$30.04 to apply toward it. Apparently someone had raised the question whether the minister, Mr. Brown, was completely honest, but the trustees hastened to assure everyone that he was indeed an honest man. Only Mr. Brown had the privilege of collecting money for the church, and anyone else collecting was probably pocketing the money. It was stated,

²⁸ Fond du Lac Register of Deeds, Land Records, April 1, 1922, v. 205, 349.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, January 30, 1879, 3.

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, February 7, 1879, 4.

³¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 11, 1879, 4.

however, that anyone who had kept money meant for the church would be forgiven if the money made its way to the church.³²

In March 1879, a debate held by Fond du Lac's white population was held at the Opera House in Fond du Lac. Lecturers were sought to discuss the topic: "Resolved, That the colored population would be more benefited by colonization than by their present condition." Charles Coleman opened the debate with the idea that the colored citizens should move to the Territories or Western States because they would be able to "improve and increase in intelligence." It had been only thirteen years since the Conrads had stepped off the train in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin to their new "freedom."

Following those remarks, Van Spence, one of the local Negroes, stood up to defend his brothers. He stated that the men wanting to colonize colored citizens knew that they were not capable of self-government. He went on to say,

Thirteen years ago, when Mr. Rogers first brought us to Fond du Lac, we couldn't walk along the street without having someone jeering at us and calling out 'Sambo, take that chalk out of your eye,' or something of that kind. In that thirteen years the four and one-half millions of slaves turned loose have advanced nobly in intelligence and general prosperity . . . and it leads to the conclusion that to keep the colored people among the whites will give the best development.³³

Josh Davis then took the podium in defense of his white friends, saying

He has much to say about being called a 'nigger.' Well, if he was colonized into a country or territory he could not hear the word 'nigger.' . . . I hold that the colored people of America would be better colonized in a Western Territory, an Eastern Territory, or some Northern Territory . . . it would be best to go West, for if they would go any further North they would freeze to death!³⁴

The following week, the Negro debate team challenged debaters from the village of Lamartine, located a few miles southwest of Fond du Lac, to a joint discussion. The subject was to be "Resolved: that the Negro has suffered more at the hands of the white man than the Indian." The challenge was accepted, and the debate must have been lively! According to the newspaper, the eight marshals who were appointed to keep the peace wore stars cut from oyster cans. The "disturbance" that took place before the debate was

³² Fond du Lac Commonwealth, March 7, 1879, 4.

³³ "On Colonization," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 21, 1879, 4.

³⁴ "On Colonization," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 21, 1879, 4.

over led to fines being imposed on a number of both black and white participants the following day at the local court. The newspaper account did not mention names. The event was largely attended, and it was noted that many were local ladies.³⁵

During 1921, people “from Oshkosh,” possibly a branch of the Methodist Church, offered their help to the black church. The Zion Church in Fond du Lac had had many pastors, most of whom did not stay more than a year and many of whom left with amounts of cash meant for the church’s benefit. The group from Oshkosh helped by repairing the building and “banking up” the church. According to Mrs. Shirley, “they fixed it up nice and warm . . . put new curtains up and worked with us.” The help continued for over two years. The next group to offer their help to the church was a group of Pente-costals from the Rosendale area. They bought 105 chairs for the church as well as an organ and a pulpit.

After a few years, members of Zion Church made up their minds to sell the church, but before they could do that, James Matthews, a member of the church, sold it without the knowledge of the rest of the members. The African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Fond du Lac was a charter member of the Michigan annual Conference; the Bishop was George C. Clement, and the Elder was Reverend S. Samuels. Both were located in the Chicago area. Mrs. Shirley claimed that James Matthews wrote to the bishop and told him that the church was “going to rack.”³⁶ According to the deed for the church, James Matthews indicated his signature by placing his mark, an X, denoting that he probably could not read or write. The question then arises, that if a letter was written to the Bishop, and Matthews was illiterate, who wrote the letter?

According to Mrs. Shirley, “they were tearing it down before we knew it. They had the roof tore off it, and Maud come and told me what they were doing. She said don’t you know they have sold the church and I said no, I didn’t know it.” She went on to say that “the presiding elder gets the money and was gone.” This elder in all probability was the James Matthews previously mentioned. Thinking that Matthews would head to Chicago, a telephone call was made to St. Matthew’s Church in Chicago. They had hoped to “head him off, but he had kept on going.” Mrs. Shirley went on to say

³⁵ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 29, 1879, 4.

³⁶ Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

that a local man “put him up a house out of the church lumber, which he didn’t pay nothing for it either, and the last time I saw the man, he had lost it, he was crying and he told me. So, I said to him, nothing from nothing leaves nothing.”³⁷

The land transaction for this final sale was recorded on July 6, 1927, and the record shows that the trustees of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church sold the church and land to Kate Pier McIntosh for one dollar. In a sworn affidavit, the court clerk stated that appearing before him was George C. Clement, Bishop of the Michigan Annual Conference, Reverend S. Samuels, Elder of the Chicago District, James Matthews, Wilton H. Shirley, and Julian Harris as well as Mrs. Frances Shirley. Their names and marks, in the form of “X,” were made on the document. Witnesses to the signatures of the trustees and Mrs. Shirley were C. M. Downs, Anna E. Schribener, and Caroline Roemer, a sister to Kate Pier McIntosh, the purchaser.³⁸ According to Mrs. Shirley, she and her son Wilton knew nothing of this sale, yet his signature and her mark are shown on the deed. Julian Harris, another trustee, also signed, and James Matthews made his mark.³⁹

In November 1915, the membership of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church stood at approximately twenty members, and by the time of the sale, it probably was even fewer.⁴⁰ We can only imagine their discouragement. They had been cheated out of church and land by one of their own members, who had possibly been paid a good amount “under the table,” before he disappeared. So many problems had plagued the little church from the beginning, including frequent changes in minister and the disputes during church meetings that had sometimes required the intervention of the local authorities to restore order.

At one of the congregational meetings, a dispute over an allowance of money to be given to the then pastor, Mr. Bensil, occurred. The congregation wanted to know the purpose for which the money was to be used. The argument grew heated, and Dan

³⁷ Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

³⁸ Concerning Lot 41, it is interesting to note that a few years later Kate Pier McIntosh, Caroline Pier Roemer, and Harriet Pier Somonds, all sisters *and* lawyers, sold the lot to Tri County Land Company in Milwaukee for \$1.00. (Register of Deeds, Land Records, November 18, 1930, v. 237, page 435). More research is needed to determine if Kate, Caroline, and Harriet actually were Tri-County Land Company.

³⁹ Register of Deeds, Land Records, July 6, 1927, v. 226, 419.

⁴⁰ “Fond du Lac Spends Large Sums In Its Religious Work,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 15, 1915, 1.

Brown threatened that there would be silence or he would remove those causing the ruckus. When someone said that Dan “wasn’t big enough to put me out,” the real trouble began.⁴¹ It was only a week later that another rumpus was noted in which several women of the congregation objected to having their names put on a list as “backsliders.”⁴² The women who “engaged in the disturbance at the church Sunday evening . . . were [each] fined \$5.00 and the costs.” Enough was paid in security to keep them from going to jail, but the fines had to be paid on the installment plan.⁴³

Most of the congregation conducted themselves and their meetings with dignity and calm. However, there were always those little flies in the ointment, such as an incident that took place during March 1880. The congregation had called a meeting for a special purpose, “and outsiders knew enough to keep away, with one exception. ‘Dat Liz Williams was dar, and she persisted in putting in her lip,’” much to the interruption of business. She was called upon to “take a walk” by the pastor and elders, but “defied them to do their badest . . . whispering that ‘no dang black coon’ could put her out.”⁴⁴ At this point Dan Brown called upon the Chief of Police, and Officer Commo was dispatched with all haste, but she had left by the time he arrived.⁴⁵

The church needed money, and Elder Dan Brown, sometimes called Reverend, made his way not only through Fond du Lac to collect funds, but traveled as far as Wausau, Milwaukee, and Eau Claire. His presence in those cities was duly noted in those cities’ newspapers as well as the local Fond du Lac papers. The church had a large debt of approximately \$300, and he wanted to solicit enough funds to pay it off. Acceptance of the Reverend Brown was varied, but in Wausau, a German newspaper stated that “lately a colored reverend, named Brown, was in this city collecting for his Fond du Lac church and upon being asked whether everything was peaceable and harmonious in his congregation he replied: ‘Oh, yes!, but the Dutch fight like hell.’”⁴⁶ At Eau Claire, he attempted to lecture, but on being introduced, the audience was so noisy that the person who introduced him suggested that the Reverend should dance them a jig. The audience

⁴¹ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, December 22, 1879, 4.

⁴² “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, December 29, 1879, 4.

⁴³ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, December 30, 1879, 4.

⁴⁴ Liz Williams may have been one of the many mulattoes living within the black community, hence the “black coon” statement.

⁴⁵ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 23, 1880, 4.

⁴⁶ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, February 3, 1880, 4.

walked out.⁴⁷ All in all, as a result of his tour of Wisconsin, as of the middle of March, he had collected \$117.09, and could therefore pay a \$20 installment on the mortgage. That amount was paid to E.B. Ingram, while the rest of the money went to pay several smaller debts.⁴⁸

During the spring of 1880, after Dan Brown had collected for the church, the pastor, George Benson, decided to explain to the public exactly how much the church was in debt and precisely for what purpose the public was asked to contribute their money and support. He told the reporter that the financial matters of the Church have been “kept in the dark,” and as for the members, “they say the preacher is the cause of all the trouble.”⁴⁹ Apparently finding himself in hot water after these statements to the press, Elder George Benson gave a detailed financial report to the newspaper.⁵⁰

By the end of April, it was reported that “the Reverend Mr. Benson, who despite the repeated assurance that he isn’t wanted about, always turns up in the pulpit of the church, like a jack-in-the-box.” Finally, one Sunday morning, shortly after this statement, the church body remained after services and voted to lock the church so that Reverend Benson could not preach that evening. Only one family and one trustee left with Benson before the meeting. The vote was unanimous that “Benson must go.”

In the meantime, Benson had announced that he would indeed preach that Sunday night. He went so far as to send the Chief of Police a message that there should be an officer present at the church that evening to “keep peace.” A reporter for the newspaper arrived at the church before the officer and watched from a distance, but there was no one to be seen. Suddenly, after it had turned dark, the lights went on in the church, and there was Benson, in the pulpit. Dan Brown appeared to confront Benson, but “Officer Commo delivered the sermon . . . ‘he would keep peace if he had to break somebody’s head to do it!’” Both sides withdrew.⁵¹

Notice was put in the newspaper regarding the fact that Reverend George Benson was no longer pastor in charge of Zion Church. The next day, a rebuttal from Benson stated that, because he was appointed by the conference, they were the only body that

⁴⁷ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 9, 1880, 4.

⁴⁸ “Local News,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 17, 1880, 4.

⁴⁹ “Elder George Benson,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, March 24, 1880, 4.

⁵⁰ “The A.M.E. Church,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 6, 1880, 4.

⁵¹ “Benson Must Go,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 26, 1880, 4.

could remove him.⁵² Two days later, it was reported that the colored people of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church had withdrawn from their conference, stating that they would be known as the Colored Methodist Church of Fond du Lac from that day on.⁵³ In that way they finally succeeded in ridding themselves of the Reverend Mr. Benson.

Ten years later, in August 1900, the church had apparently affiliated again with the Methodist Episcopal Zion Conference, because the Fond du Lac church hosted a very large conference. Representative ministers from all over the U.S. attended, some from as far away as Salisbury, North Carolina, and Rochester, New York. The conference took place from Thursday through Monday evening. Churches within the city of Fond du Lac, as well as Mayor Hoskins, welcomed the African-American people who were attending. Both the Congregational Church and the Methodist Church invited the black ministers to give sermons in their churches that Sunday morning. The entire city was invited to attend the meetings and prayer services. Afterwards, tables heaped with wonderful food prepared by women of the church were available for those attending. A reception for Bishop George C. Clement was held the last day, and, for a special treat, Yoel Yoseph, a Turk living in Fond du Lac, appeared in traditional Turkish costume and gave a speech explaining the ways of his native land.⁵⁴

Census reports of the 1800s and early 1900s indicate that the Contrabands were generally employed as domestics, barbers, or laborers, and some were farm hands. A great many of the non-white people were listed as mulattoes, possibly offspring of the plantation owners. The 1860 census shows that Waupun and Ripon, both within Fond du Lac County, had more blacks resident at that time than did the city of Fond du Lac. The greatest concentration of blacks in Fond du Lac County in the 1860 census was in the Township of Taycheedah, which listed two large farm families.

The 1870 census for Fond du Lac city, reflecting the arrival of the Contrabands, lists thirty-seven households, consisting of 174 blacks, living in the First, Third, and Fifth Wards of Fond du Lac. Many were listed as mulattoes. By the time the 1880 census was carried out, the black families had spread into other wards. Whereas previously they had

⁵² "Elder George Benson," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 28, 1880, 4.

⁵³ "Concerning The Colored Church," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 30, 1880, 4.

⁵⁴ "The Conference Began Today," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, August 28, 1900, 3.

lived near their church on West Twelfth Street, their zone of residence had expanded to include an area east of Main Street, on Ninth, Tenth, and Eleventh Streets.⁵⁵ Some of the younger people listed as mulattoes in the 1900 and 1910 census married into either white or Indian families. Those married to whites were listed in the 1920 census as white. The 1920 census shows that many blacks had left the Fond du Lac area, and those who remained were listed as pursuing occupations such as porter, maid, washer woman, janitor, or laborer.⁵⁶

In the late 1800s, some of the blacks in Fond du Lac opened their own businesses. Charley Johnson owned a saloon known as Astor Hall, and it was reported that it was one of the first in Fond du Lac of “modern style.” It was described as a billiard bar, with a back room for cards. The first barbershop in Fond du Lac was located on Main Street, owned by John Reilly, said to be “a darky with an Irish name.” John had married an Indian woman, and many times their home, located behind the shop, was the scene of Indian “pow-wows.” Reilly or his wife would sneak out and obtain liquor, illegally provided to Indians according to the laws of the day, for those attending sessions that often lasted until morning hours.⁵⁷

In July 1918, a movie studio, run by blacks, built a large stage near Luco (now on Highway 151 North between Lakeside Park and Roosevelt Park). Called the Ebony Film Company, they produced their first film, a comedy called “Catastrophe Cassie.” Two carloads of scenery were installed on a stage measuring 100 x 80 feet. Twenty-five people were working at the company, and they planned to produce two pictures a week. “Catastrophe Cassie” was to be shown in a local theater upon its release. Directing much of the filming was W. N. Buckley, a former producer of the Keystone comedies.⁵⁸

An interesting wedding took place in 1899 at the African Methodist Evangelical Zion Church, and the local newspaper carried an account of the event. The two who were married were William Jones, also known as Uncle Billy, who stated that he was 179 years old, and his bride, Mrs. Louisa Davis, who claimed to be just over the century mark. Many had to stand outside the church, because it was too small for the number of

⁵⁵ Bureau of the Census, 1880 Census of Fond du Lac County (Washington, D.C., 1880).

⁵⁶ Bureau of the Census, 1920 Census of Fond du Lac County (Washington, D.C., 1920).

⁵⁷ A.T. Glaze, *Incidents and Anecdotes of Early Days and History of Business* (1905), 164, 200.

⁵⁸ “Ebony Studio Now In Full Swing,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 8, 1918, 5.

people attending—a group in which there were more white faces than black. Each chair had two or three occupants, and other latecomers had to slide in through the windows in order to view the ceremony. Notable white attendees arrived early to get front seats in the church, and the reporter stated that, because of so many “swell” guests, the genial janitor’s “wooly head was very nearly turned.” This patronizing racist attitude was typical of reports of the time. Reverend Muggage performed the ceremony, the marriage being the fifth for Uncle Billy, but probably only the second for his bride. A reception was held in the church for several hours, with the beaming couple seated on chairs in front of the pulpit. Sandwiches and coffee were served. The reporter also stated that, at the door of the church, admission of ten cents a head was charged, with the proceeds going to the newlyweds to start their new life.⁵⁹

During 1903, the black community in Fond du Lac was active, in that they sponsored debates, hosted speakers, and were quick to help someone in need. The Charity Club, formed by the black women of the community, had as its objective to give aid to needy families or individuals. As an example, a benefit after a meeting of the Club realized the amount of \$6.30 for Mrs. Angie Raglin, who had been sick for three months.⁶⁰ On August 1, 1917, two hundred black delegates attended the second annual convention of the Co-operative Development and Progressive Association in Fond du Lac. This organization was made up of “colored people of Wisconsin, founded for the purpose of advancing racial development, adjustment, progress and efficiency among the colored people of the state.” Prominent men from Fond du Lac and other cities in Wisconsin addressed the assembly.⁶¹

During the 1920s, the United States saw the revival of the Ku Klux Klan, and even Fond du Lac did not escape the effects of its shadow. Membership in the Klan in Fond du Lac was over 1,000, according to the head of the Wisconsin group, although it has always been common for such groups to engage in wild inflation of their secret membership rolls. It was said that many of the most influential businessmen and professionals from the Fond du Lac area were members. Leaders of the Klan offered speeches to those who were interested in the Klan, and many attended the meetings,

⁵⁹ “A Colored Elite Wedding,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 5, 1899, 3.

⁶⁰ “Colored Society Gives A Benefit For A Sick Member,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, May 26, 1903, 4.

⁶¹ “Negroes Meet In Convention,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, August 1, 1917, 2.

including women.⁶² In March 1924, over 1,500 people crowded into Armory E to listen to the goals of the order, purposes that actually boiled down to simple white supremacy.⁶³ The following month, in April, six wooden crosses were burned on the streets of Fond du Lac. Locations of the cross burnings were at Lincoln and Division, Fourth, east of Main, Scott east of Main, Five Points (now Military and Western), and on West First Street, near Darling Place. All of these burnings were areas where the black population of the city lived. Each cross was composed of oil-soaked burlap wrapped on a frame made out of double two-by-fours that were six feet high by four feet across. Fond du Lac was not the only area to have such cross burnings. North Fond du Lac and Ripon also reported incidents in their communities.⁶⁴

Things seemed to quiet down for a few months, but then, in July 1924, the Klan held a large meeting and initiation in Van Dyne, several miles north of Fond du Lac. Klansmen from both Oshkosh and Fond du Lac attended. The meeting drew more than 300 people, and 75 new members were initiated into the Ku Klux Klan. A huge cross was burned, and it was said that it could be seen across the waters of Lake Winnebago.⁶⁵

No mention is made of the black community or their feelings regarding the activities of the Klan. There were those citizens in Fond du Lac who absolutely condemned the KKK and all that it stood for.⁶⁶ One of these organizations was the High Y Club of the local Y.M.C.A. They openly expressed their disgust with those who would join the Klan. Then, in September 1924, the Klan sponsored a meeting using a tent on South Main Street. The newspaper of the day named two Fond du Lac workers at the Klan meeting that day, the Reverend J. W. Leonard and W. P. Charles, who was the prime organizer of the event.⁶⁷

In July 1926, the Klan planned a two-day “Klonvokation” just south of the city on Park Avenue, scheduled to take place during the 4th of July holiday. Tents were set up

⁶² “1,000 Ku Klux Members In This City, Says King Kleagle,” *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, May 5, 1923, 2.

⁶³ “Klan Lecture at Armory E An Orderly Affair, 1,500 Hear National Lecturer Talk,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 8, 1924, 5.

⁶⁴ “Police Have Clue To Fiery Cross Episode,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 14, 1924, 5.

⁶⁵ “Klan Meeting At Lange Farm, Huge Cross Is A Center Piece,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 15, 1924, 12.

⁶⁶ “High Y Club Deplores Klan,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 18, 1924, 5.

⁶⁷ “Klan Meeting Plans Changed,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 19, 1924, 5.

and plans for meetings and a celebration were made. The Klan decided to use guards, armed with rifles and shotguns, who would stay on duty all night. Security was employed because Klan tents had been burned by those opposed to them during meetings in two Wisconsin cities, Hudson and Marinette. That same day, a parade of 5,000 Knights of the Ku Klux Klan, their wives, and children took place. The procession started at the tent grounds, moved northward on Park Avenue, turned at Sheboygan Street to Main, then on Main Street to Fifteenth Street, returning to the tented grounds at Seventeenth and Park. Thousands lined the streets to watch, and it was observed that as many women were in the parade as men. Afterwards, as many as 5,000 to 8,000 people flocked to the grounds to join in the festivities. The evening ended with a huge flaming cross, which lit up the entire grounds.⁶⁸

Was it coincidence that, only a few months later, the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church on West Eleventh Street was sold under suspicious circumstances? Could some of those “influential people” among the local Klan membership be those who bought the land for one dollar? According to the Klan, a women’s group had been formed, “Women of the KKK,” and it was very active.⁶⁹ Perhaps prominent women from Fond du Lac were members.

Over the years the black population had decreased for many reasons, but after the church was sold, even more left the area. There is evidence in the census enumerations of 1910 and 1920 that perhaps some of the younger women of the black community had married into families in the surrounding Fond du Lac area. There were several who married members of the Brothertown and Stockbridge Indian tribes.

The last of the Contrabands to live in Fond du Lac was Mrs. Frances Shirley. She had married Charles Shirley after she arrived in Fond du Lac with the group of former slaves whom Reverend Rogers had brought to the area. Frances and Charles lived on Dixie Street, named in honor of the large number of black families who lived in the area. Charles, born in 1834, had been sold on the auction block as a slave, according to his

⁶⁸ “Armed Fighting Men Guarded Klan Klonsvokation Near City,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 6, 1926, 4.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

obituary, and he was very young when he came to America aboard a slave ship.⁷⁰ It was also stated that for a short time he had been a slave on the plantation of General Robert E. Lee. From there he was sold to a Kentucky slaveowner and remained there until, during the Civil War, he was among the first to escape to the North.⁷¹

Charles was blind for twenty years prior to his death, but he managed to live a full life despite his handicap. According to his wife, he could walk all over the city. Even though he got lost at times, he eventually made his way home. He filled in as the preacher at the African Methodist Evangelical Zion Church when they were without a pastor, which was often enough. He was very active in the Church and claimed never to have missed church service on Sundays. When “Father” Shirley, as he was called, died, the entire church was draped with black mourning cloth, even the chair that he had used every Sunday.⁷²

Mrs. Shirley died in 1943 at the age of 95. She was born September 5, 1847, on the plantation of Colonel Jack Harris. That plantation was located in Russelville, in Franklin County, Alabama. When the Civil War started, she was a girl of fourteen. She and her mother, Evelyn Harris, escaped with the help of Union soldiers, eventually arriving at Fond du Lac. In the course of several interviews by local newspapers, Mrs. Shirley told an interesting story of her youth. After being smuggled through Southern lines, she and her mother came to Fond du Lac after several weeks of travel. They had been shifted from town to town, sometimes riding on the top of freight trains. When she was asked about the cruelty of slavery, she made a very moderate reply, explaining that some masters were good to their slaves, while others were not. What she considered her “most terrible memories” took place when the plantation owners realized that the Civil War had actually begun, and they became panic-stricken, frightening their slaves. Many plantation owners burned their fields to prevent Union soldiers or “Yankees,” as they

⁷⁰ Britain outlawed the Atlantic trade in slaves by its subjects in 1807, and the United States banned participation by its citizens in 1808. Beginning in the 1820s, the U.S. and British navies cooperated to help suppress the trade, but the Atlantic slave trade continued so long as slavery was legal in much of the Americas, that is, until the mid 1860s.

⁷¹ “Former Slave Passes Away,” *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, February 22, 1911, 8.

⁷² Mrs. Frances Shirley Interview.

Mrs. Frances Shirley

were known, from having them. She told of the fear experienced while staying hidden in a cave for many days to avoid the bloodshed.⁷³

“Grandma” Shirley, as she was known, worked for many prominent Fond du Lac families. She was cook, domestic, and governess to their children. Even though employed most of the time, she found time to raise ten children of her own, and she outlived her husband and all of her children. She spent the last few years of her life at the County Home, and she enjoyed remembering the past with those who would take the time to listen. She was buried at Estabrooks Cemetery, with the Reverend F. M. Morse of the First Baptist Church officiating.⁷⁴

Her death in 1943 marked the end of an era for Fond du Lac County, which at one time had the largest black population in the State of Wisconsin. Fond du Lac, along with other Northern States, could not accept the presence of a black population without resorting to racism, even though many in the North had gone to war to stop slavery. They expected too much from the blacks in too short a time. The blacks had no skills, because few had been taught anything but cotton farming and a labor-gang approach to agriculture. They were illiterate, because they were not allowed to learn to read or write. They had come from what today might be called a “developing” country, and they were thrust into a culturally alien society that considered them animals or worse. The Fond du Lac Contrabands had tried. They came to the city with high hopes for freedom, and most had found productive work. A church had been built with high expectations, only to be sold under questionable circumstances and without the knowledge of its members. Some succeeded, opening their own businesses, while others, especially mulattoes with lighter coloration, were able to “pass,” blending into the white community and thereby escaping the stigma of race. But in the end, a large black community, full of life, laughter, and music, and once a part of Fond du Lac, vanished. Its people left or disappeared, one by one, until only one was left, a proud grandmotherly lady named Mrs. Shirley

⁷³ “Mrs. Frances Shirley, Alabama Slave, Her 92nd Birthday,” *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, September 3, 1938, 3.

⁷⁴ “Woman Who Came To City As Slave Girl 81 Years Ago Dies.” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 30, 1943, 3.

Marr St., Fond du Lac, Looking North, 1870s
Several Churches Active in the Temperance Movement are Shown
(From Left) St. Peter's, Congregational, Presbyterian, St. Joseph's First Baptist

The Temperance Movement in Fond du Lac, 1847-1878

Kate G. Berres

Temperance became a key issue in many of the new ideologies related to self-control that became significant in the middle of the nineteenth century. The supporters of this movement saw it as a chance to make citizens free to be rational and productive in a society that was changing from one that was agricultural and rural to one that was industrial and increasingly urban. The temperance movement was also very closely related to other social reform movements of its time and perhaps served as a catalyst for anti-slavery, women's suffrage, the organization of labor, and the "literacy for all" movements.

Central to the beliefs of adherents to the temperance movement was the positivist school of thought of that era. It was commonly held that human society and individuals were continually trying to evolve and move themselves toward a state of perfection. Temperance proponents thought that this was to be achieved through self-control and elimination of "violent and irrational impulses." Reform movements of the time were in synchrony with the nineteenth-century search for self-restraint and respect for authority, as well as with the middle classes' attempt to achieve respectability. Temperance reformists also gave birth to the concept that alcohol had a definite negative effect upon the body.¹

The temperance agitation in the United States passed through three different cycles. The first phase of the movement began during the American Revolution and ended around 1840. Temperance at this time was a social reform movement meant to deal with the social and economic realities of a new and evolving nation. This version of reform was supported by those persons who had been actively involved in the creation of the nation, mainly the upper echelon of society.²

The second cycle of temperance activity, (1840-1860), tended to appeal more to the middle class than had the previous cycle. This cycle incorporated the Victorian morality of the earlier movement. Its principal accomplishment was the establishment of

¹ Denise Herd, *The Paradox of Temperance* (New York: Vintage Books, 1981), 356-7.

² For a description of the three cycles of reform, see Jack S. Blocker, *American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform* (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1989).

so-called “Maine Laws” in some states or cities. The Maine Law took its name from the State of Maine, which in 1851 became the first state to become “dry” in the United States, followed by about a dozen other states.

The third cycle of temperance activity, which ran from 1860 to approximately 1892, marked a change of emphasis in the temperance movement. Whereas earlier temperance efforts had emphasized moderation or consumption of less intoxicating alcoholic beverages, this phase stressed total abstinence from all forms of alcohol and was effectively the beginning of what was later to be called the Prohibition Movement. Temperance was also closely allied to the other reform movements of the day, such as the women’s movement. Women became the energizing force behind the third cycle of temperance reform. Often, they were the backbone of the organizations, and there were many all-female societies. While the third temperance cycle has been the most studied of all of the temperance cycles, it is also notable that it was the least effective in altering people’s drinking habits.

The temperance movement began as an attempt by the upper class to curb the alcohol consumption of the masses through preaching about the evil of hard spirits. The movement was not concerned with the fact that alcohol was being consumed. Rather, it was concerned about the extent of such use by newly immigrant laborers. The consumption of beer, wine, and cider was deemed appropriate, accommodating the tastes of the German and Irish populations who would otherwise have succeeded in thwarting the entire temperance movement.³ As time went by, the temperance movement shifted gears and began to change its tactics to appeal more to the “average” American and to focus on the behavior of the middle classes.

In towns, temperance activities typically began on a very small scale. Concerned individuals invited speakers to come to talk about the evils of demon rum and the like. These meetings gradually evolved into societies or clubs that took on the temperance cause while providing a social outlet for the membership.

In a rapidly changing nation, the temperance movement was a product of social change as an urban community developed, but it was also a generator of further reform.

³ Jed Dannenbaum, *Drink and Disorder: Temperance Reforms in Cincinnati from the Washingtonian Revival to the WCTU* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1984), 622.

It addressed what was regarded as a very serious problem, alcohol overuse and abuse. The temperance movement, as a vehicle of social reform, also helped change society's expectations of the role of the churches in America, involving them more actively in solving social problems. The movement allowed businessmen and managers to assert greater control over their workers. In turn, temperance helped prepare the work force to make the transition from a pre-industrial society to an industrial one. Finally, the temperance movement was one of the precursors of the women's suffrage movement, as it was an early vehicle for women to assert themselves in activities and leadership outside of the home, and it was one of the few "legitimate" spheres in which women who lacked political and economic autonomy could exert their influence in a public forum.

Fond du Lac was established as a community in 1836 by the Fond du Lac Company, which the year before had purchased public land at the "south end of the Winnebago Lake."⁴ The population of the area was sparse. The majority of the people who lived in the Fond du Lac area had migrated from other sections of the Wisconsin Territory and from sections of the United States that had been settled earlier, especially New York. Some, however, were new immigrants from Europe, particularly from the Germanic Confederation and nearby German-speaking countries such as Switzerland.

Fond du Lac's heritage suggested it would be a community in which alcohol use was widely accepted. In 1852, five years after the very first temperance meeting was held in the Fond du Lac area, there were three saloons and thirteen groceries stores where intoxicating drinks were sold. All of the hotels, except for two, had bars that sold alcohol, and there was one brewery.⁵ However, the number of places in Fond du Lac county where intoxicating drinks were sold had decreased over fifty per cent by 1850, suggesting that there had been at least six saloons in Fond du Lac at one time or another during the previous decade. It may also be that, during the five years since the temperance movement started in Fond du Lac, the local cause for temperance had already enjoyed some success.

But the apparent success of the temperance movement in Fond du Lac is challenged by many of the anecdotes related to the places for sale of alcohol discussed in the

⁴ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac: Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1991), 19-21.

⁵ *Business History of Fond du Lac County*, 227.

daily newspapers and described in the *Business History of Fond du Lac County*. All of the early hotels sold liquor, while Harry Blythe, Alex Gillies, and Harry Jones kept whiskey shops. The “modern-style” saloons included Chandler’s Beer and Pie Shop, Charley Johnson’s Astor Hall, the Meyer, and the Bischof places. Proprietors of drug stores, if they sold liquor other than for medicinal purposes, were required to obtain saloon licenses. The places where liquor was sold in the 1850s were less numerous than they became in the decade of the 1870s, when it was said that a man could get drunk, without much trouble, any day of the week. But drunkenness wasn’t without its penalty. The fine for public drunkenness in Fond du Lac during this period was five dollars, a sizable sum.⁶

Fond du Lac, as well as the rest of the nation, had a genuine need to curtail alcohol consumption. From 1800 to 1830, approximately 30 gallons of alcohol was imbibed each year by each man, woman, and child in the United States. As many as five deaths a day, nationwide, were attributed to accidents in the workplace due to drinking and drunkenness on the job. Part of this alcohol consumption could be attributed to the lack of potable water in developing areas in the United States, but this was not the case in Fond du Lac.⁷

Fond du Lac’s early experience provides many examples of people who, through their behavior, made an extremely convincing case for temperance. When someone in such a small community became intoxicated and did something while under the influence, the incident often made the newspaper or, worse, became local history or legend.

According to the *Business History of Fond du Lac*, in the fall of 1852, B. F. Moore of Fond du Lac ran for the State Assembly against Joseph Wagner of Marshfield. The night before the results of the election were announced, friends of Moore decided to celebrate, because they were almost certain that Moore had secured a victory. They took their celebration to Chandler’s Beer and Pie Shop. There they became extremely loud and intoxicated. An innocent bystander who was passing by the shop peeked in the window at the precise moment that a large beer glass came crashing through the window, striking him on the chin, knocking him down, and filling his neck and chin with glass. O.

⁶ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 13, 1872.

⁷ W. J. Rorabaugh, *The Alcoholic Republic: An American Tradition* (New York: Oxford University, 1992), 10-11.

B. Tyler, a young lawyer, was the one who had thrown the glass, and he was very ashamed of his behavior. His embarrassment was so great, it was said, that from that day, when the man he had struck with the beer glass walked down the street, Tyler would cross to the other side to avoid having to make eye contact with him. Tyler later moved to California, rumored to have been driven there by his embarrassment over the incident.

In 1848 John Reilly owned the first barbershop in the city of Fond du Lac, an establishment located on Main Street next door to the office of a local newspaper, the *Fond du Lac Journal*. Reilly's wife was an Indian, and at that time it was illegal to serve alcohol to an Indian. Violations of this law were treated harshly. Reilly's house, which was immediately behind the barbershop, was apparently a "meeting place" for local Indians. Reilly, it was said, would provide alcohol for these gatherings. Within an hour of providing alcoholic drink to the Indians, usually only two or three of those present remained sober enough to look after the others. The noise generated by these gatherings was often a subject for complaint by those who were employed at the *Fond du Lac Journal*. The noise on one occasion became so unbearable that Forbes Homiston, the city constable, was convinced by the employees of the *Journal* to go into the house and quiet the noisemakers. Witnesses stated that, less than one minute after entering the house, the constable came out of the house and ran down the alley as "fast as his little legs would carry him!" He stated afterwards that there were far "too many bright butcher knives in there to suit him. Others might play with those fellows if they wanted, but he wouldn't."⁸

On May 28, 1872, the *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth* recorded that a man in the Third Ward got drunk on the Monday of that week, went home, and horse-whipped his new bride. He then ordered her to pick up her things and leave. She left him and secured a room in a local hotel. She sent the hotel baggage man to collect the rest of her belongings. When he went to her home, her husband refused to allow him to take her things. The woman eventually took steps to bring to justice the man who sold her husband the liquor; however, the outcome was never reported.

Such accounts illuminate understanding of the social problems and attitudes toward alcohol, gender, and race that typified a growing city such as Fond du Lac. While these stories may seem almost commonplace or even trivial in terms of today's events, to

⁸ 1880 *Fond du Lac County History*, 142.

mid nineteenth-century Fond du Lac they suggested a profound problem. Through these alcohol-related situations, like the “pow-wow,” in the words of the *Journal*, or the moral embarrassment of the man who had thrown the beer glass reported in the *Business History*, one can see some of the early attempts to impose accountability on the providers of alcohol who had helped produce these events. Published accounts stirred contemporaries to action, suggesting that there was a very real case for the temperance movement in the city of Fond du Lac.

The earliest reported attempt to present the case for temperance in the Fond du Lac area came in 1847. Eli Hooker, a Whig lawyer from Waupun who was also part owner of the *Fond du Lac Journal*, delivered a speech on the topic of temperance at the schoolhouse in Fond du Lac.⁹ A year later Fond du Lac’s first temperance society was established.¹⁰

The foundation of the West Fond du Lac Temperance Society and election of its officers took place on January 3, 1848. The first act of official business was to formulate their temperance resolutions, which were published in the March 29, 1848 issue of *Fond du Lac Journal*. These resolutions summarized the society’s beliefs. Society members believed that there was a need for temperance in the city and areas surrounding Fond du Lac. They proclaimed vendors of alcohol and tavern keepers to be a menace to the city and that the increased sale of liquor by these individuals was becoming a great problem in the city. The resolutions also called for all Christians to lobby for laws to be passed against the availability of liquor in the city of Fond du Lac. The society stated that anyone who sold grain to be used in making liquor was liable for the decline of families and of the moral conscience of the community. The resolutions also proposed that the retail sale of alcohol should be outlawed and that liquor should only be sold by county or city officials for mechanical, chemical, or medicinal purposes. The group then stated their central belief: those who used alcohol would become a burden on the community, because they might develop the tendency to spend all of their money on intoxicating drinks, neglect upkeep on their property, and perhaps damage the property of others. In

⁹ 1880 *Fond du Lac County History*, 142.

¹⁰ For a list of the Fond du Lac Temperance Societies and the year in which each was founded, see Appendix.

short those who used alcohol might become paupers, criminals or both, a drain on the community or, worse, become a “brute.”

The most important result that the West Fond du Lac Temperance Society achieved was the establishment of Temperance Prairie, a plot of land located between the North and South branches of the Fond du Lac River. The West Fond du Lac Temperance Society declared this area to be alcohol-free in their resolutions, sought to stop the sale of intoxicating liquors in it, and, consequently, in their words, aimed to prevent the “vomit from the inebriate from polluting its virgin soil.”

It is important to note that the resolutions of the West Fond du Lac Temperance Society referred only to hard liquor, specifically distilled spirits such as whiskey. Beer, wine, or cider were not mentioned in their resolutions, and one can only assume that, like other temperance groups of the time, the West Fond du Lac Temperance Society accepted their moderate use.¹¹

Another temperance society that was founded during this period was the Good Templars. In the city of Fond du Lac, there were several different branches of the Good Templars, each founded at a different date. The earliest branch of the Good Templars in the city of Fond du Lac met as early as 1853.¹² This branch of the Good Templars represented the city in a temperance convention held in Madison on June 9, 1853. The order of business at the convention was to attempt to establish a “Maine Law” in the State of Wisconsin. The effort was voted down by the convention, suggesting that temperance supporters in Wisconsin took a more flexible view of consumption of alcohol than did those in other states.¹³

After the apparently easy defeat of the Maine Law at the convention in Madison in 1853, the Good Templars seemed to fade into obscurity until 1857, when another society of the same name appeared.¹⁴ This revitalized society of the Good Templars enjoyed more success. They sponsored many “dry” activities in the community, like picnics, festivals, and temperance rallies, employing the services of talented speakers from the area. The Good Templars, together with the Grand Lodge of the Good

¹¹ Rorabaugh, 10.

¹² *Fond du Lac Herald*, July 6, 1853.

¹³ *Fond du Lac Herald*, May 24, 1853.

¹⁴ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, April 6, 1859.

Templars, another temperance organization that surfaced around the same time, united forces to host a state wide Temperance Convention in Fond du Lac in early September 1858, a meeting that was attended by 50 delegates from around the state.¹⁵

In addition to the Good Templars, the West Fond du Lac Temperance Society, and the Grand Lodge of the Good Templars, Fond du Lac developed two other splinter group temperance societies. These were the Excelsior Temple of Honor, an exclusive, all-male temperance society established in 1873, and the Independent Order of the Good Templars, established in 1878.¹⁶ Fond du Lac was reported to have had the largest membership in lodges of the Good Templars in the state of Wisconsin, with the total number of members exceeding 250 people.¹⁷

But even the Good Templars members weren't above temptation. On one lodge meeting night, two well-known men in the community were to be initiated into the Good Templars. One of the prospective members suggested that they go to Harry Bly's and have a last drink. The last drink turned into the last several, and when the time came for the two to be initiated, they were "quite full of booze" and unable to be initiated. However, they did join the Good Templars at a later date and apparently became productive members.¹⁸

During its early years, temperance, both in the United States in general and in Fond du Lac, was a cause that was commonly adopted by secular-minded reformers. Very few churches, except for Methodist Church revival camp meetings, were involved in the early temperance movement. In 1810, a number of reform-minded ministers began to adopt the cause of temperance at the Andover Seminary in New Jersey. During the next two decades, various clergymen joined and spread the message across the country.¹⁹

Advocates of a religious approach to temperance saw faith as a way to ease the anxieties that they believed led to drinking. They saw drinking itself as the agent of the devil. The temperance movement met the needs of churches and the growing religious sentiment across the United States during the early nineteenth century. Temperance also provided an avenue for demonstrating religious commitment, in that it allowed

¹⁵ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, September 15, 1858.

¹⁶ *1910 History of Fond du Lac County*.

¹⁷ *Business History of Fond du Lac County*, 205.

¹⁸ *Business History of Fond du Lac County*, 205.

¹⁹ Rorabaugh, 206-209.

parishioners to do the Lord's work: to cleanse the nation of sin and evil. Drinking was very much a part of what they wanted to cleanse. Religious supporters of temperance were drawn to the movement by the logic that a drinking man could not give himself to God because his drinking confirmed the hardness of his heart, and he was damned by God because intemperate men seldom repented. One preacher remarked, "From the United States, then, what an army of drunkards reel into Hell each year."²⁰

Some churches opposed the temperance movement. The belief of many was that "God gave the spirit in the fruit of grain and the ability to extract it and decoct it, and then he gave them the inclination to drink." Churches that shared this opposition included some Baptist churches, who were sometimes referred to by temperance people as "Forty Gallon Baptists." Some of these Baptist congregations in fact expelled a member either for gross public intoxication or for joining a temperance society.²¹

The earliest building constructed for religious services in Fond du Lac County was the Old Brown Church, built in Taycheedah in 1842 and used by many denominations. By the end of the 1840s, many churches had been built in the County.²² The temperance message was advocated in Fond du Lac churches as early as 1853, when the St. Patrick's Temperance Society was formed.²³ Almost two decades later, in May 1872, the St. Joseph's Temperance Society combined forces with the St. Patrick's Temperance Society to form the Catholic Total Abstinence Society.²⁴ This organization met on a monthly basis.²⁵ A Methodist Temperance Society was also in existence at least by 1853.²⁶ Fond du Lac boasted a Maine Law League, as well, which was predominately Presbyterian. Apparently, these societies were successful in recruiting members. St. Patrick's Temperance Society had begun with only 15 members, but within a year the Society numbered 250.²⁷

While critics on the national level suggested that involvement in social issues threatened the purity of religious experience and supplanted the proper role of secular

²⁰ Rorabaugh, 209.

²¹ Rorabaugh, 209-210.

²² Mentzer, 103-108.

²³ *1854 History of Fond du Lac County*, 56-57.

²⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 13, 1872.

²⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 28, 1872.

²⁶ *Fond du Lac Journal*, May 23, 1853.

²⁷ *1854 History of Fond du Lac County*, 56-57.

authorities, the rising interest in religious involvement in the temperance movement clearly coincided with the first popular campaigns against alcohol. The success of secular temperance societies became apparent only later than those that were religiously motivated. The renewed interest in organized religion interwove religion and temperance to address the same underlying social problems. Eventually, American society's expectations concerning the involvement of churches in work to solve social problems changed as well.²⁸

The secular community's temperance societies in the city of Fond du Lac grew rapidly from the mid-1860s to the early 1870s, approximately a decade after the emergence of the church-based societies in the 1850s. These societies created their own "dry" haven or subculture in the city of Fond du Lac. They held various temperance society picnics and mass rallies. They hosted speakers and encouraged some of their own members to speak to audiences on behalf of the society.²⁹ In essence they created a separate dry community in which to operate.

Their "dry world" extended to public establishments that they owned, operated, or visited. Despite their prominence in the 1870s, some of these groups been in existence for decades. The Fond du Lac House (No. 2), owned by Dr. Mason Darling, was a temperance hotel that opened in 1838. In 1846, the Temperance Cottage, a small hotel, was opened on the corner of Main and Court Streets by John Driggs, a temperance man. The Temperance Cottage was dubbed by locals as the "dish-water castle," because absolutely no alcohol was served on the premises. Non-temperance people chose to combat the establishment of these dry hotels by direct competition with them, and this created much tension within the city. For example, the Exchange Hotel was established by Theodore Herbert in 1838 expressly to compete with the Fond du Lac House (No. 2). Herbert and his wife decided to start the Exchange Hotel, because they recognized the sheer number of people who would stay with them in their residence, on the corner of Main Street and Forest Avenue, in preference to staying in one of the temperance hotels. Herbert let it be widely known, much to the chagrin of the temperance people and the amusement of other citizens, that he always had a barrel of the best whiskey on tap and

²⁸ Rorabaugh, 200-211.

²⁹ *1880 Fond du Lac County History*, 205.

that Mrs. Herbert herself had sold the first glass of whiskey in the city of Fond du Lac. Another challenge to the temperance establishments was the Badger House, built in 1846 on the corner of Main and Western Streets. Apparently there was quite a lively competition between the Badger House and the Temperance Cottage.³⁰

Newspapers played an important role in promoting the cause for temperance. Royal Buck was the proprietor and editor of the Whig newspaper, *The Fountain City Herald*. His newspaper was famous for its short moralizing stories about the decline of man due to demon rum and other distilled spirits. The *Herald* was also filled with songs and poems promoting the temperance cause. However, *The Fountain City Herald* was not the only paper that reported events related to temperance. Although from 1853 there were columns in that newspaper devoted to temperance affairs, temperance related stories made an appearance in nearly every issue of Fond du Lac's various other newspapers of the day.

The temperance issue was also eagerly seized upon by many businessmen. Many of Fond du Lac's staunchest supporters of the temperance movement were middle and upper class proprietors or manufacturers who had a personal and economic interest in the promotion of temperance in the workplace. During this period the United States was making the transition from a pre-industrial society to an industrialized one. Employers looked to create a compliant, reliable, and disciplined work force and saw the temperance movement as one way to instill an industrial labor ethic and discipline. Success in convincing their workers of the value of moderation, abstinence and temperance seemed likely to guarantee their success in business, while their interest also had a public relations value of associating them with a "virtuous" effort to shape public morality.³¹

Furthermore, national industrialization required the accumulation of large quantities of capital. The budding capitalist rationalized that, by drinking, workers were literally pouring potential capital for investment, in the form of alcohol, down their throats, thereby squandering the nation's future. Manufacturers and business owners often told their workers that efficiency and self-discipline would increase productivity, and that this in turn would lead to higher wages and to the possibility for advancement.

³⁰ 1880 *Fond du Lac County History*, 603.

³¹ Joel Bernard, *From Fasting to Abstinence: The Origins of the American Temperance Movement* (Ann Arbor: MacMarshall, 1979), 347.

This was the theme of countless self-improvement tales modeled after Horatio Alger's popular success stories. Intemperance was seen as a primary threat to this process.³²

But the promotion of temperance on the job site wasn't just an attempt to further the growth of capitalism and industry. Temperance was a necessity, a matter of personal and collective safety in some areas of work. While industrial accidents were seldom reported in Fond du Lac, it would be an error to assume that local businessmen did not keep national statistics on the question in mind. And of course trying to curb their employees' alcohol consumption was also an example of employers attempting to exert greater control over their workers. The concern by manufacturers for the number of deaths related to intemperance in the United States certainly was related to genuine concern for improvement of the dreadful "human condition," but it was also connected to businessmen's wishes to protect their businesses and their property from the financial consequences of unsafe and unproductive employees.

The temperance movement was one of the reform movements deemed to be socially acceptable for active and public involvement by women. Temperance was a more popular reform movement for women than was anti-slavery, perhaps because the consequences of abuse of alcohol so often had a negative impact on families. In women, the cause of temperance found perhaps its greatest proponents. According to the nineteenth century "cult of domesticity," women were thought to be the guardians of the home and morality. The idea of femininity discouraged women from drinking, because women were supposed to show restraint and virtue as well as a certain delicacy. Furthermore, alcohol beverages might be dangerous to a "fragile constitution," a common characterization of what was seen at the time as female inferiority. Furthermore, the public did not accept the idea of women drinking in public places like taverns or grocery stores, unless they were recovering from a long day's journey. Even then, a lady was expected only to order a highly watered down, highly sugared cordial.³³

Yet the concept of delicacy and femininity did not prevent women from downing alcohol-based medicines. Women who might otherwise regard alcohol consumption as vulgar were led to believe that these concoctions would safeguard their health and cure a

³² Rorabaugh, 211.

³³ Rorabaugh, 12.

remarkable range of diseases and conditions.³⁴ Fond du Lac women were no exception in this regard. The Fond du Lac newspapers of the nineteenth century were filled with various advertisements for medicinal elixirs that were largely alcohol, all touted as beneficial for the delicacies of women's health and guaranteed to prevent intestinal imbalance.³⁵

Often women were portrayed as victims of male intemperance, a victimization that was all the greater due to their political and economic dependence. A classic example of this was the situation referred to above pertaining to the anonymous woman from Fond du Lac's Third Ward who was horsewhipped by her drunken husband.³⁶ Nationally, temperance reformers were the first reformers to speak publicly about a link between excessive drinking and domestic violence. Temperance speakers and columnists in various newspapers publicized major cases of wife beating and called for legislation that would enable the drunkard's wife to free herself and her children from the drunk's control. Fond du Lac's Benevolent Society proposed setting up an Employment Bureau through which women who had been placed in a "compromised position" by an intemperate husband could obtain a limited amount of work that could be performed in the home. The profits of such work were to be placed into a reserve fund, under the control of women, for benefit of women and their children.³⁷ The columnist who reported this proposal asserted that he believed intemperance to be one of the great causes of poverty and that he knew of many families in the city of Fond du Lac who were suffering the consequences of intemperance.

Women who saw themselves as potential victims of male intemperance were likely to support temperance. Nationally, a majority of the participants in the early temperance movement were women. But the leaders of the temperance movement were predominantly men. Of the 99 people who assumed leadership roles in temperance societies in the city of Fond du Lac during the period 1853 to 1878, only thirty-seven, or nearly forty per cent, were women. The early societies prohibited women from assuming leadership roles until 1861. The year 1861 was significant because it marked the

³⁴ Rorabaugh, 12-13.

³⁵ For an early example, see *Fond du Lac Herald*, July 6, 1853.

³⁶ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 13, 1872.

³⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 13, 1872.

beginning of the Civil War. As men from Wisconsin, including those from Fond du Lac, enlisted in large numbers in support of the Union cause, women had no choice but to undertake leadership roles, due to the absence of the men, if the societies were to continue to function.³⁸ After 1865, seven of the ten women who had assumed leadership roles in their societies during the Civil War continued to do so. In the years that followed, these seven women were joined by at least 24 others, and this suggests that Fond du Lac did not precisely follow the pattern of gender roles within its societies that existed elsewhere in the United States.³⁹

In the decade of the 1870s, Fond du Lac temperance societies began to change the focus of their activities. Instead of seeking to inform and enlighten the whole population about the evils of drinking, that is, to control the problem through moral suasion, they began to seek to rid the city of Fond du Lac of alcohol through legislation against the sale of alcohol. There was much discussion in the various temperance groups about how to get a prohibitory liquor law passed in the city of Fond du Lac, but nothing of the sort was formally proposed in a governmental body.

The temperance columnists in the newspapers also changed in the way that they reported alcohol-related incidents. From their accounts, it appears that the cause of temperance had suddenly become an incredible bandwagon, and everyone in the area was hopping aboard. What exactly accounted for the change is uncertain. Perhaps the end of slavery had refocused the energies of some earlier reformers on temperance, or perhaps the increasing pace of urbanization and industrialization made temperance seem that much more of an urgent cause. Increasing public support may also have been a consequence of the torrent of publicity concerning temperance doctrines through newspapers, churches, and businesses. Newspapers started to do more reporting on which citizens were becoming intoxicated in the liquor-selling establishments of Fond du Lac. In addition, the newspapers were assiduous in reporting any disturbances that occurred in

³⁸ Mentzer, 50.

³⁹ This analysis is based on a tally of individuals named in published accounts of activities of various temperance societies during the period. It is representative of the “public face” that the local temperance societies presented to the community. Records of Fond du Lac temperance groups have not survived.

businesses where alcohol was sold. These articles also provided information to readers on how to identify a person who was under the influence of alcohol in public.⁴⁰

By about 1878, Fond du Lac temperance societies had either become anti-liquor societies, supporting prohibition of all sale of alcohol, or they had dropped out of public view completely. Perhaps the societies changed their focus because their previous standards for temperance had not been effective in changing the behavior of those who imbibed. Popular opinion may have been shifting in the direction of support for prohibition of the sale of alcohol as the best means to curb the negative affects of alcohol, since those who themselves drank to excess seemed unwilling or unable to reform. Most Fond du Lac temperance societies became the new anti-liquor leagues or the anti-bar leagues of the city.

In general, the temperance movement in the city of Fond du Lac followed the national pattern of such organizations. In Fond du Lac, there was not very much publicly articulated or written opposition to the movement, but the movement evidently, by its own standards, did not enjoy great success during the period of the 1850s through the 1870s. However, one exception seems to have been that women in Fond du Lac played a larger leadership role during this period than was the case in many American communities. Why Fond du Lac women continued to stay in their leadership roles after the men had returned from the army remains unclear. Perhaps Fond du Lac women were a bit more progressive or assertive when it came to retaining their leadership roles, or perhaps the women leaders were able to sustain support of the society membership through what was regarded as effective leadership.

Whatever the explanation, Fond du Lac's temperance societies did enjoy some successes in their mission. They recruited many people to join the various organizations. They succeeded in educating a portion of the populace about some of the dangers of alcohol and the effects of alcohol on the body. They certainly succeeded in creating a public presence for their message through speeches, events, and printed materials. The movement doubtless helped some people to examine their own drinking patterns, as well as the behavior exhibited by their neighbors. The temperance movement also supplied

⁴⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, May 13, 1872.

the platform for launching the advocacy movement that succeeded in promoting the national prohibition laws that would be enacted after World War I.

The temperance movement was crucial in energizing church involvement in addressing societal problems, and the temperance movement contributed to helping manufacturers prepare the American workforce to participate in an industrialized society. It also served as a vehicle for women to begin to participate in public activities that would increasingly have a political edge, and the movement gave many women some experience in community leadership roles. The temperance movement was certainly a major factor in shaping the Fond du Lac community into the city that exists today.

Appendix

Fond du Lac's Temperance Societies

Society	Year of Foundation
West Fond du Lac Temperance Society	1848
Methodist Temperance Society	1853 or earlier
St. Patrick's Temperance Society	1853
St. Joseph's Temperance Society	1855 or earlier
Maine Law League	1850s
Fond du Lac Good Templars	1853, 1857
Fountain Lodge #45	1857
Emery Lodge #330	1865
Star Lodge	1860s
Hastings Lodge #228	1860s
Grand Lodge of the Good Templars	1857
Catholic Total Abstinence Society	1872
Excelsior Temple of Honor #8	1873
Independent Order of the Good Templars #410	1878

One Community, One School: One-Room Schools in Fond du Lac County

Tracey Haegler and Sue Fellerer

Federal and state statutes enabled schools in Wisconsin to operate, but the sociological norms and values of the individual agricultural communities determined the day-to-day operation of the rural schools in Fond du Lac County. Rural communities held great power and influence over education. They determined what was to be taught and who would be hired to teach the children. Thus the rural schools became a reflection of the community's values, experiences, and expectations.

Formal education began in Wisconsin with the establishment of French fur trading settlements in Green Bay in the eighteenth century. As the territory flourished, towns grew and developed into ordered communities that regarded education as necessary for their further development. The Land Act of 1785 and the Northwest Ordinances of 1787 included the first laws concerning educational foundations in Wisconsin. These ordinances drew upon the ideas of Thomas Jefferson, who was one of the first to suggest that the revenue from the sale of public lands be used to finance public schooling. Under the Articles of Confederation, Congress enacted the Land Act of 1785 that divided the Northwest Territories (Ohio, Illinois, Indiana, Michigan, and Wisconsin) into townships of six square miles, each of which was further divided into 36 sections.¹ When new states and territories were formed, the federal government dedicated one section in each township for support of common schools (a term used until 1875 to describe one-room country schools).² The Ordinance of 1787 asserted that "religion, morality, and knowledge were necessary to good government and the happiness of mankind, schools and the means of education shall forever be encouraged."³ The Ordinances set the precedent in Wisconsin for education to be supported by public land grants.

The first organized school in Wisconsin was established in 1791, when Pierre Grignon, a French fur trader, hired Jacques Porlier (the first recorded teacher in Wisconsin) to teach his children. By 1817, schools were open in Green Bay and in Prairie du Chien. These schools

¹ Gerald Gutek, *Education and Schooling in America* (1991), 73.

² Throughout this essay, the term "rural schools" refers to one-room schools, or common schools.

³ Wyman D. Walker, "A Breathtaking Development," in *History of the Wisconsin State Universities* (River Falls, Wisconsin: State University Press, 1968), 7.

received support from religious organizations and from the community.⁴ Legislation creating the Michigan Territory provided for tax-supported schools. Wisconsin, a part of the Michigan Territory from 1818 to 1836, crafted territorial legislation regarding schools that stated:

- 1) The township should have the responsibility for examining teachers and visiting schools.
- 2) The cost of school construction was to be defrayed from district taxes on property; however, the tax could be paid in labor or in kind, instead of money.
- 3) If funds were insufficient, a rate-bill tax could be levied on the parents in proportion to the number of children the family had in school.
- 4) Parents were required to contribute wood for fuel based upon the number of children the family sent to school.
- 5) The cost of teaching impoverished children was to be paid from the general property tax.⁵

Early schools in Wisconsin were called subscription schools, because they were supported by funds raised through subscriptions, tuition, and land rental fees. Teachers usually were paid poorly, and at times they were paid only in commodities. It was not until 1845 that the first free school in Wisconsin was established in Southport, now Kenosha. This was due to the support of Colonel Michael Frank, a member of the territorial legislature, who introduced a bill that provided tax support for public schools. The impact of Frank's efforts can be seen in the immediate increase in the number of public school teachers in Wisconsin. In 1846, there were approximately 387 public school teachers; by 1847, the number of teachers increased to 502.⁶ Frank's law, with some minor modifications, was incorporated into the Wisconsin State Constitution in 1849. By 1936, there were 138,344 children enrolled in 6,600 one-room schools, whose yearly operational cost was approximately \$8,570,000.⁷

Although common schools were regarded as a means to serve the agricultural community, they were not uniquely a Wisconsin development. The establishment of one-room schools began with Joseph Lancaster (1778-1838), who established a large, factory-like "monitorial" school in London as early as 1797.⁸ Monitorial schools had a master teacher who trained advanced students to act as monitors, and who, in turn, taught basic skills to beginning students. Lessons in monitorial schools were reduced to specific elements, with each element being

⁴ Jerry Apps, *One Room Country Schools: History and Recollections from Wisconsin* (Amherst, Wisc., 1996), 22.

⁵ Apps, 11-12.

⁶ Alice E. Smith, *The History of Wisconsin: From Exploration to Statehood*, v. 1 (Stevens Point, Wisconsin: Worzalla Publishing Co., 1973), 583.

⁷ Clay J. Daggett, ed., *Education in Wisconsin* (Whitewater, Wisconsin: Whitewater Press, 1936), 25.

⁸ Gutek, 64.

assigned to a particular monitor; each monitor was then placed with children who were grouped according to their ability. To keep costs down, inexpensive materials and large wall charts (instead of books) were used, and students traced letters with their fingers on sand tables instead of using pen, ink, and paper.⁹ Gradually, these monitorial schools were replaced by common schools.

One of the founders of the common school movement was Horace Mann (1796-1859). An advocate for public education, Mann wanted schools to teach democratic values, because he believed that “the democratic process required literate voters who would be better equipped to elect public officials.”¹⁰ Common schools had many similar features to the monitorial schools: peer monitoring, ability grouping, mass education, supervision by one teacher, and limited financial resources. The goal of the monitorial school was to provide the cheapest education possible to the most people in the shortest amount of time. Common schools also were providing “mass” education, but they had to do it cheaply because the entire community lacked the financial resources needed to provide a more elaborate educational system. In addition, community values often limited the resources that would be dedicated to education.

A primary goal of the common school in Wisconsin was to create citizens who would respect the community’s interests. Wisconsin’s educational system, as influenced by Horace Mann’s philosophy, advocated schools that were characterized by smaller classes in smaller buildings and with a central focus on the rural community’s democratic values, experiences, and expectations. As a result, rural schools in Wisconsin were “community originated, community supervised, and community financed” to insure that the community’s interests would be met.¹¹

Wisconsin embraced free public education as a priority during the first Wisconsin Constitutional Convention in Madison in 1846. In 1848, the Constitution was ratified, and Wisconsin became a leader in the free public education movement. Central to Wisconsin’s leadership was Article X of the Constitution. This Article included provisions establishing Wisconsin’s educational system. The School Law of 1848 was built upon this constitutional authorization to provide for:

- 1) Free elementary education to everyone between the ages of four and twenty. Financing the schools would come from proceeds from the sale of every sixteenth

⁹ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 78.

¹¹ Daggett, 25.

section of land, dedicated to school use, and from interest from proceeds gained by the sale of federal land grants that were originally designated for such purposes, as provided by the Northwest Ordinance of 1785. Other funding was to come from state, township, and district taxes.

- 2) The election of a State Superintendent of schools.
- 3) The authority of township boards of supervisors to organize school districts within their respective townships.
- 4) For township school superintendents who would examine and certify teachers, and who had the power to consolidate township school districts, but did not have the power to create districts.
- 5) For districts to vote a tax of not more than twenty dollars for globes and similar instructional equipment, and for a tax of thirty dollars for building a library.
- 6) A mandate that schools must be open for at least three months during the year, either winter or summer term, or both.
- 7) A prescribed curriculum that contained the following subjects: reading, writing, arithmetic, geography, English grammar, orthography (spelling), and other subjects as the board wished to add.
- 8) The State Superintendent to have general supervisory authority over all state schools.¹²

Wisconsin continued its quest to insure the education of its citizens by creating the State's first compulsory education law in 1879.¹³ The law mandated parents to send their children to school regularly: full-time between seven and sixteen years of age, if in proper physical and mental health; full-time between sixteen and eighteen years of age, if unemployed and not yet graduated from high school; but part-time (six and one-half hours per week), if employed; half-time between sixteen and eighteen years of age, if employed at home.¹⁴ In some rural Wisconsin communities, this meant that students who previously stayed home from school to work in the fields would attend school at least half-time. In the rural community, the compulsory education law either was interpreted liberally or was laxly enforced, because the agricultural community's interests often placed productive labor above education.

Resistance to schooling gradually declined as changes in farming technology reduced the amount of labor required in the fields, as a growing population reduced the amount of land dedicated to farming, and as the community developed a stronger sense of the value of education. By

¹² Apps, 16-17.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 23.

¹⁴ *Elementary School Handbook for Teachers and Principals* (Fond du Lac Public Schools: August, 1957), 23.

1920, rural attitudes on the importance of education had changed, the law on compulsory school attendance was strictly enforced, and children in Wisconsin's rural communities were no longer allowed to stay at home to work in the fields.

The goal of educating the growing youth population of Wisconsin could be more easily met as State authorities were able to access monies that were accumulating in the school fund for the development of the educational system. School funds, created by the sale of the sixteenth section of every township in Wisconsin (as dictated by Congress), were not available to the Wisconsin Territory until it became a state.¹⁵ Previously, Wisconsin, as a territory, could only raise money through leasing public lands, but leasing provided only a fraction of the funds that could be realized from the sale of public lands.¹⁶ Statehood better enabled Wisconsin to equip its schools, train its teachers, and educate its children. Common schools utilized school funds to meet a growing population that was still further swelled by the eventual enforcement of the compulsory education law.

In 1869, the State Legislature established a "township system of school governance."¹⁷ Under this system, each town became one school district, and the existing school districts became sub-districts. Each sub-district elected a clerk, a group of officials who collectively were known as the "Board of Directors."¹⁸ A typical school board was composed of elected, white, wealthy males of the community. Duties of the Board included holding an annual district meeting in July, determining finances for the next school year, selecting a school site, if one was not already established, voting on how to spend tax money on necessities, choosing or approving the textbooks to be used, maintaining the schoolhouse, hiring the teacher, expelling students, and insuring that all items that were recommended for the schools by the State Superintendent were acquired.¹⁹ Primary control over a school resided at the district level, with the State government having only a limited role. As a result, the school board was the major locus of authority over the educational system of both urban and rural communities in Wisconsin.²⁰

The authority that the school board held in Fond du Lac County can be seen in the annual records from the annual July board meetings that decided the future of the school. Issues that

¹⁵ Edward Searing, "Educational History," in *History of Wisconsin*, (State Superintendent of Public Instruction), 146-147.

¹⁶ Smith, 586.

¹⁷ Searing, 141.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 146-147.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 146.

²⁰ Clay Daggett, 25.

were discussed included the length of the school year, free textbooks for the school, school repairs, and the monthly salary and contracts of the teachers. For example, according to the District Clerk's General Record Book of the Town Line School, motions were made to raise \$3,000 from a levy on all taxable property for the coming year, to purchase a piano for not more than \$75, to purchase new desks not to exceed a total of six, and to provide a higher salary in order to recruit "a better than average teacher."²¹ Most of the district's power came from its ability to set the budget deemed necessary to support the school. For Town Line School, the Board allotted \$3,000 annually for the operation of the school during the years 1953-1957. Only in 1958 did the Board increase the budget by \$1,000, and this increase was made because the school needed costly repairs such as the installation of fluorescent lights, a ventilation check to improve efficiency, a study of the heating system, and a new wire for a "school curtain for entertainment."²²

Another way in which community leaders in the school district exercised power over local education was through direct involvement of the community. The upkeep of the school-house depended directly upon the community, and some communities demonstrated more parental involvement for the school's upkeep than others. For instance, at Hayes school in Eldorado, the wood-burning furnace had deposited soot on the inside of the school. When Darlene Ries arrived in the morning, she discovered that the school was dirty and damaged to the extent that school would have to be canceled until the school was cleaned and the furnace repaired. It took only one day for community members to clean and paint the inside of the school and to make the needed repairs so that school could be held the next day.²³ The support of those parents provided an example of the measures some communities took to insure the operation and maintenance of their school.

In contrast, Forest Grove School, located between Armstrong and Dotyville, fell into disrepair during the Great Depression and World War II. The School Board did not appropriate funds needed to maintain the school, and there was a lack of parental involvement. The disrepair was remedied when Darlene Ries began to teach at Forest Grove School, for Ries immediately organized a Parent Teacher Association (PTA) that undertook to repair the school.

²¹ Town Line Board Minutes, July 1953- July 1959.

²² Town Line Board Minutes, July 1953-July 1959.

²³ Darlene Ries Interview (Pseudonym, See Appendix), October 29, 1996.

The PTA purchased a flagpole, fixed the windows, painted the school, and purchased a new stove.²⁴

In addition to parental and community support, the character of the local economy also influenced the maintenance of schools. Those communities with more resources could afford better care for their schoolhouses, while poorer communities might not be able to afford to maintain their schoolhouses adequately.

In Wisconsin, the school board often selected the school site, and this sometimes created problems among rural neighbors and between school board members. Disagreements over the site might occur because it was impossible to please everyone within the community with one particular site. One acre of dry, elevated land in the geographical center of the district often was deeded or leased to the district by a farmer. Ideally, this land was close to the residences of families whose children would be attending the school.²⁵ If these families moved, the schoolhouse might be relocated closer to the remaining pupils in the school district, and the original site then reverted to the original donor or donor's family. Fond du Lac County School District Number 7, which included the towns of Rosendale and Springvale, was only able to lease a one-half acre plot (for \$1.00) from Armina E. Brill for the school district to use as a school site in 1850. This contravened the one-acre regulation, but the rural communities in Fond du Lac County often used whatever land was available, and at times it was impossible to get one full acre. There might be other special requirements. The aforementioned lease, for example, stipulated that the district construct a fence around three sides of the property, and it also requested that the timber on the land be left standing unless the school district deemed it necessary that the trees be removed at some future time. The lease also stipulated that the land was to be considered school property until the school ceased to operate.²⁶

Most schoolhouses were designed by architects whose plans were made available through architectural handbooks. Henry Barnard, an influential schoolhouse architect and also a leader in the common school movement, became Chancellor of the University of Wisconsin (1858-1860)

²⁴ *Ibid.*

²⁵ Oliver E. Wells, *Architecture, Ventilation, and Furnishing of Schoolhouses* (Madison, Wisconsin: Democrat Printing Company, 1892), 9.

²⁶ Town Line Board Minutes, July 1953-July 1959. (Lease contract is attached within the record book).

and later the United States Commissioner of Education (1867-1870).²⁷ Barnard presented plans in the latest architectural style, addressing exteriors, interiors, yards, mechanical equipment, and

²⁷ Andrew Gulliford, *America's Country Schools* (Washington D.C.: Preservation Press, 1984), 167.

One-Room School at Ries Cemetery, 1912

furniture. Barnard's influence on Wisconsin's common schools can be seen in features such as rectangular stone or brick foundations, built two feet above the ground, a V-shaped arched roof, oblong windows, poorly insulated walls, hardwood floors, dual entryways, a bell tower, and a wood-burning stove.²⁸ Apart from the architect's plan, the land surrounding the school was characterized by uncut grass, outhouses, play equipment, and, in most cases, a flagpole.

Architectural styles in rural Wisconsin communities reflected the frugality of the community in both structure and building materials used. The weaker economies found in the agricultural communities generated only limited financial resources to construct the schools.

Rural Wisconsin schoolhouses were important to their communities in many ways that were not specifically related to education. Groups such as the 4-H club, homemakers' club, sewing club, quilting club, and the PTA (Parent Teacher Association) held their meetings there. County agents demonstrated new farm products or techniques. Town meetings, wedding receptions, and community social activities such as baseball games, spelling bees, town picnics, and town dances all took place in the schoolhouse or on the grounds. Children often provided entertainment for Halloween, Thanksgiving, Christmas, Easter, and Mother's Day programs, with an emphasis on the annual Christmas pageant. Some districts went so far as to ask prospective teachers during their interviews if they would be willing to put on a Christmas program.²⁹ Social events, like town dances, often caused damage to the schoolhouse that had to be repaired before the next school session.³⁰ For many years, agricultural communities continued to use their one-room schools for social, political, and other entertainment purposes that served to unite communities and to educate their children.

In addition to exercising control over finances and social functions of the rural school, district leaders also governed the teacher. The rural community in Wisconsin exercised power through regulations incorporated in teaching certificates and contracts. Before 1841, teacher certification was virtually nonexistent. The certification process began with passage of Wisconsin's 1854 licensing statute, which required teachers to pass examinations given by the town superintendent. The town superintendent had the power to demand reexamination of a teacher whenever he deemed it necessary, and he could revoke the certificate for whatever

²⁸ Wells, 9.

²⁹ Bonnie Dunn Interview, January 1, 1997.

³⁰ Gulliford, *Country Schools*, 79.

reason he deemed appropriate.³¹ Examples of the questions on the teacher examinations included:

“Explain the telegraph instrument.”

“Were there ever glaciers in this country? State evidence that justifies your answer.”

“A farmer bought a number of sheep for \$80; if he had bought 4 more for the same money, he would have paid \$1 less for each. How many did he buy?”³²

A teacher who failed a non-standardized test in one district might move to another district and attempt to pass its test. Once the test was passed, a certificate was issued that was only valid in that district.³³ Due to variability in the local regulations of teaching examinations and certificates, uniformity in the hiring process and in the quality of teachers was impossible.

Without uniformity among districts, discrimination easily occurred in hiring practices. School boards often stipulated the characteristics they desired in a teacher before any applicants were interviewed. Many boards went so far as to specify their preference for a male teacher. Other characteristics that were considered desirable by the rural community, besides knowledge of content, were punctuality (considered to be the most important trait), neatness (not only in dress but also in the classroom), quietness (i.e. dignity in handling children), order (class-room management), and cheerfulness.³⁴ These “exemplary demeanors” were discussed in a lecture at the Oshkosh State Normal School, and they were expected to be demonstrated by the rural schoolteacher who, after all, served as a role model for the community’s children. These characteristics were to reinforce the behavior that the community sought to develop in their children.

Teaching certificates were not standardized by the State until 1862. Standardization of the teacher examinations followed later.³⁵ Individual districts eventually lost their authority to certify teachers as they were replaced in this function by county and state superintendents. Even though the authority passed out of the control of the district, the community still retained control of whom it hired to teach its children through the powers vested in the district school board. The

³¹ Research Bulletin 74-7, “History of Certification Procedure, Part I” *Certification and Licensing of School Personnel*, Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff (Madison: July 3, 1974), 3.

³² Peter Burke, Special Committee on Teacher Preparation, Licensure and Regulation, (Madison: October 22, 1996), 2.

³³ Conrad E. Patzer, *Public Education in Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin: 1924), 124-127.

³⁴ Oshkosh State Normal School notebooks of Charles E. Searls (1883) and Lucy Micklesan (1886), University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, Polk Library Archives.

³⁵ Research Bulletin 74-7, “History of Certification Procedure, Part I” *Certification and Licensing of School Personnel*, Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff (Madison: July 3, 1974), 3.

school board sought to maintain control over its schools, because it claimed to know what was best for its children and could thereby promote the community's values, expectations, and goals. They feared the State would disregard the community's concerns and might encourage values that conflicted with those of the community.

The 1862 standardization of certification led to the development of a graded certificate system that divided teachers into three different categories, based on required testing by the county or city superintendent in different content areas. The third grade certificate required teachers to pass examinations in orthoepy, orthography, reading, penmanship, arithmetic, primary grammar, and geography. The second grade certificate required the teacher to pass the subjects of the third grade certificate, in addition to grammatical analysis, physiology, physical geography, elementary algebra, United States history, and the theory and practice of teaching. The first grade certificate required teachers to pass the second and third grade examinations in addition to higher algebra, natural philosophy, and geometry. The first grade certificate, the most difficult to receive, was valid for five years; the second grade certificate was valid for three years; and the third grade certificate for just one year. The Platteville Normal School (October 1866) provides an example of the curriculum of these schools intended to prepare teachers for these examinations. Subjects included penmanship, English grammar, arithmetic, spelling, reading, physical geography, algebra, Latin, German, trigonometry, surveying, United States history, drawing, geometry, rhetoric, criticism, physiology, philosophy of natural history, vocal music, and theory and practice of teaching.³⁶

By 1878, the first steps towards state certification occurred when the State Superintendent was given the authority to issue an unlimited certificate or a limited certificate that required renewal every five years. By 1917, the State Superintendent had obtained the authority to approve the standards of attainment for teaching applicants set by each county superintendent.³⁷ Beginning with the 1939-1940 school year, the State took over all powers of certification. Consequently, the graded certification system was gradually replaced by State administration. The State Superintendent of Public Instruction could grant exemptions from the requirement that all teachers complete two years of schooling beyond high school devoted to "pedagogical instruction and training." Any teacher who had taught in a common school prior to

³⁶ Gulliford, *Country Schools*, 71.

³⁷ Research Bulletin 74-7, "History of Certification Procedure, Part I" *Certification and Licensing of School Personnel*, Wisconsin Legislative Council Staff (Madison: July 3, 1974), 4.

1937 was allowed to continue to teach without complying with the new State certification regulations.³⁸

Training for teachers in Wisconsin began in institutions that usually held classes during the summer months. The classes, offered by the state school superintendents, provided a way for one-room schoolteachers to interact and exchange information and practical advice on teaching.³⁹ To support teacher training, Wisconsin passed the Act of 1857, establishing the Swamp Land Fund from sales of land under a Federal law of 1850. The Act authorized use of 25 per cent of the income from these sales to fund teacher training in the various colleges and academies that supported a “Normal Department.”⁴⁰ In 1865, the Wisconsin State Legislature created a state system of teacher training schools called “normal schools.” Henry Barnard originally recommended this concept during the Constitutional Convention in 1846. Barnard’s idea was patterned after the educational system he had organized in Rhode Island and Connecticut.⁴¹

The State normal schools were initially unable to meet the demand for trained teachers in Wisconsin. As a result, in 1899 the State Legislature passed a law that allowed any county without a State normal school to establish and fund a county normal school. The first county normal school opened in Wausau that same year. By 1924, thirty-two such schools were operating in Wisconsin.⁴²

The county and state normal schools’ curriculum focused on subject content. “Education” courses emphasized administration and other skills that one-room schoolteachers would need in their day-to-day teaching experiences. One of the benefits of attending the county normal schools was that first-year students were placed in nearby schools to help them become familiar with the routine and to assist the regular teacher with supervision of recess, spelling, and other duties. Second-year students also were placed in a rural school, but they spent more time teaching. In contrast, students at a State normal school were placed in a model school or a demonstration room, in essence a practice classroom located within the State normal school.⁴³ The county normal schools actually provided hands-on experience in a one-room school, a practical advantage for the teacher in training, whereas the State normal schools did not. The

³⁸ John Callahan, “The Certification of Teachers in Wisconsin,” Department of Public Instruction (Wisconsin: July 1939) Wisconsin Statutes, Section 39.05.

³⁹ Apps, 42.

⁴⁰ Wyman, 8.

⁴¹ Patzer, 131, 140.

⁴² Wyman, 42-43.

⁴³ Wyman, 45.

state and county normal schools generally offered similar courses of instruction, although the state schools typically provided a broader range. In the county normal schools, the faculty were more approachable, the atmosphere was more informal, and there was more practical experience.⁴⁴ The State normal school courses also might not be structured in a way that could be used in the classroom, and there were fewer opportunities for practical experiences.⁴⁵

Teachers were expected to follow the rules established by school boards and rooted in the expectations and values of the community. Many rules were influenced by the community's attitudes toward the roles that women were to play within society at that time. Typically, women were not supposed to be seen drinking or smoking. They also were not to work once they began a family. In some states, such as Wyoming, Nevada, and Kansas, female rural teachers were expected to resign once they were married. This was not the case in Wisconsin, however, if only because of the shortage in numbers of teachers relative to the number of positions available. Teachers were allowed to marry, but it was implied that they should resign once they became pregnant. Communities that imposed rigid regulations on the social life of the teacher risked losing that teacher.

Rules often varied according to the gender of the teacher. In some rural communities, female teachers were not allowed to go out with a man unless accompanied by a family member. Male teachers did not have comparable restrictions. Rules sometimes dictated where the teacher lived. Wyoming, Nevada, and Kansas required teachers to live at the schoolhouse, because schools were more isolated, and bad weather might damage the schoolhouse if no one were present to watch the building. Wisconsin regulations were more lenient. Teachers were required to live in the district, but the teacher was expected to domicile with her own family or to board with another resident. Female teachers were not permitted to live independently, for any reason, and the requirement to take care of the school also was in force.⁴⁶

One-room schoolteachers in Wisconsin in the late nineteenth century primarily were women. They were expected intuitively to know the community's rules. In some communities, the rules were not written, and teachers would only know if they had violated a rule through community reactions, which might range from sharp criticism to dismissal. In general, the rural

⁴⁴ Mary Crandel Interview, February 3, 1997.

⁴⁵ Dotty Grange Interview, December 1997.

⁴⁶ Gulliford, "The One-room School Lives," *Principal*, (September 1985), 6.

community allowed male teachers more freedom than females, and the men were subject to less criticism concerning their social lives.

Community values influenced the school as well as the teacher. Children were expected to be educated according to the same system under which their parents and grandparents had been taught. The prevailing attitude was, “If it was good enough for me, then it is good enough for my children.”⁴⁷ This is exemplified by the case of Eva Schrauth. In her classroom, Schrauth had a stove that did not have a grate. The teacher, like the community, generally “made do” with what was available. Thus, it did not occur to Schrauth to ask for a new stove or that a grate be installed in the stove, because that was how it had been for a long time. She simply used a piece of wood in the ash pan to hold up the kindling.⁴⁸ Often, the one-room schoolteacher would teach out of the same textbook that the teacher herself had used when she was a student at the school. Missing stove grates and old textbooks characterized both the conservatism and the lack of resources of the community.

Nineteenth century Fond du Lac County rural schools held two terms, winter and summer terms. Women teachers were favored for the summer term, when older male students stayed home to work in the fields. Male teachers were preferred for winter session. Summer terms lasted from May until August or September and the winter terms from November until April. It was not until after 1900 that the school year was standardized into a single nine-month term beginning in September and ending in May.⁴⁹ Once the single nine-month term was established, almost all of the teachers in the one-room schools were women.

**Male to Female Teacher Ratio in One-Room Schools in Fond du Lac County,
Derived from County Superintendent’s Annual Reports.⁵⁰**

	Male	Female
1920-1921	9	188
1924-1925	16	189
1932-1933	23	183

⁴⁷ Eva Schrauth Interview, December 17, 1996.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ Paul Theobald, “Country School Curriculum and Governance: the One-room School Experience in the 19th Century Midwest,” *American Journal of Education*, v. 101 (February 1993), 121.

⁵⁰ County Superintendent Annual Reports from 1920 to 1940.

As the chart indicates, there were many more female teachers than male teachers in the one-room schools. The disparity stemmed from two main sources. For male teachers, the salary of a one-room schoolteacher was not sufficient to support a family, and this fact deterred men from teaching in the one-room schools. It was widely presumed that women were better inclined to work with children, and they were therefore encouraged to enter the teaching profession.⁵¹ Most women were encouraged to become either nurses or teachers. The salary was small, responsibilities were onerous, and they were expected to leave the profession once they were married. Evidence of high turnover in the profession can be seen in the *Fond du Lac County Superintendent Annual Reports* for 1921 and 1932. In 1921, only four of 197 teachers had more than eight years of experience. In 1932, only six of 206 teachers could make that claim.⁵²

**Numbers of Teachers by Gender and Distribution of
Male and Female Annual Teacher Salaries in One-Room Schools
Fond du Lac County Superintendents Annual Reports.⁵³**

	Male	Female
1920-1921		
\$ 75-\$100	0	20
\$100-\$130	2	154
\$130-\$160	1	13
\$160-\$200	6	1
1924-1925		
\$ 75-\$100	0	33
\$100-\$130	8	139
\$130-\$160	2	16
\$160-\$200	6	1
1932-1933		
\$ 75-\$100	8	138
\$100-\$130	1	43
\$130-\$160	4	8
\$160-\$200	5	0
\$200-\$250	5	0

Although the salary was not sufficient for male teachers to support a family, they were generally paid more than female teachers. As the above chart indicates, by 1933, female teachers were overwhelmingly at the bottom of the pay scale, while the scarcer male teachers were scattered throughout the scale, with many of them in the higher pay range.

⁵¹ Teacher Interviews, common theme, see Appendix.

⁵² Fond du Lac County Superintendent Annual Reports for the years of 1921 and 1932.

⁵³ Salaries from County Superintendent Annual Reports.

It was common for teachers to negotiate individual contracts with school boards.⁵⁴ In some cases, teachers were paid more for their experience and level of education. A few schools sought the least expensive teachers they could find, thereby restricting their pool of candidates.⁵⁵ There usually was not much competition for rural teaching jobs. When a school board offered a higher salary, then there normally were more applicants for the position.⁵⁶

The pay that teachers received seldom reflected the amount or variety of work that they did. The teacher often acted as school nurse, in charge of the children's welfare. Teachers were instructed to watch for signs of illness in children in an attempt to stop its spread. If a child had a severe cut, a sliver, or a broken bone, the teacher was responsible for providing first aid for these injuries or helping students procure medical attention from a doctor. The community not only gave the teacher the responsibility of educating its children, but also the responsibility of maintaining their general well-being.

Teachers also had many custodial responsibilities such as carrying in wood and lighting the fire, cleaning the schoolhouse, erasing and washing the chalkboards, and filling the water-cooler. Other duties might include organizing and presenting a Christmas program, collecting books from the county library, and sometimes taking children to obtain their vaccinations. During World War II, teachers handed out sugar ration books, clothing, and food stamps, and even collected milkweed pods for the fibers.

Time spent on individual subjects and grades was often merely fifteen minutes. A typical day of school, as set by the county superintendent, would look similar to the following schedule:

Morning

7:00 a.m.	Teacher Arrives at school
9:00 a.m.	(Pledge of Allegiance) Classes started with singing/music
9:15 a.m.	First Grade Reading and then progress upward through the grades combining seventh and eighth grades (while progressing through the grades, two grades at a time, as they finished their reading would take their recess until the seventh and eighth graders would join them for the last fifteen minutes).
10:45 a.m.	Start Math classes

Afternoon

Noon	Fall and Spring had one hour lunch/recess Winter had one half hour lunch/recess
1:00-2:15 p.m.	Reading, Geography, and History (subjects divided by grade)

⁵⁴ Cindy Johnson Interview, October 29, 1996.

⁵⁵ Teacher Interviews, common theme, see Appendix.

⁵⁶ Bonnie Dunn Interview, January 1, 1997.

2:15 p.m.	Recess
2:30 p.m.	Language period
3:30-4:00 p.m.	School dismissed ⁵⁷

This schedule left little time to help students with problems or to take disciplinary measures. There also was very little time in the one-room school for disruptions such as when an unruly student created a disturbance within the classroom or when older boys directed cruel games and practical jokes towards their teacher to see if they could “run her out of the school.”

Corporal punishment was used very rarely.⁵⁸ Although teachers were not restricted legally from using corporal punishment, there was always the threat that the parents of the unruly child might consider it unjust and cruel chastisement. To avoid such situations, teachers often devised alternative means to maintain discipline.⁵⁹ Often a misbehaving student would be held after school for fifteen minutes. To children attending a one-room rural school, this was a very effective punishment, because the children of the school would walk home together. To be held after school meant that they walked home alone. Keeping a student after school stigmatized and isolated the student from classmates. Another method of discipline was to deprive children of recess. Specific offenses required specific actions. Children heard swearing had their mouths washed out with Ivory soap.

As a last resort, the teacher might schedule a conference with the parents and might send the child home until the conference took place. Expulsion powers were reserved for the school board.⁶⁰ Often, the teacher simply talked to the student and explained right and wrong behavior, and the student subsequently behaved. In some instances, the teacher might not need to intervene at all, because siblings told their parents what had occurred at school and the parents’ punishment often was more severe than anything the teacher might inflict. Fear of their parents’ wrath was a major deterrent.⁶¹ This “sharing” of information also served as a link of communication between parents and the teacher and between the teacher and the community, reinforcing the community’s expectations of the teacher.

Parents almost always trusted a teacher’s decisions. Consequently, there appear to have been very few disputes between the community and the teacher. Although the teachers enjoyed

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Almost all of the teachers interviewed said that they had never used corporal punishment.

⁵⁹ Darlene Ries Interview, October 29, 1996. This was a common theme in teacher interviews.

⁶⁰ Larry Smith Interview, February 3, 1997.

⁶¹ Rita Green Interview, November 5, 1996.

great respect and assumed supreme authority in the classroom, there was always a check and balance system in place.

County and State supervisory teachers made rounds throughout their jurisdictions, inspecting the activities at rural schools. These supervising teachers, appointed by the county superintendent, were required to be former teachers who were familiar with the one-room school system.⁶² Some supervisors had higher education, such as a master's degree, and they usually were willing to provide help to a beginning teacher and act as a liaison, sharing methods and ideas with teachers.⁶³ Supervising teachers arrived at the school unannounced to observe the teacher interacting with the class. Sometimes these unexpected visits caused considerable commotion, as occurred in Rita Green's classroom. Green had a rule that the students were to put their boots and coats behind the piano, out of the way. On the day of the supervising teacher's visit, a pair of boots was left out in front of the piano. When Green asked to whom the boots belonged, none of the students responded. Because the supervising teacher was present, Rita was more forceful than usual in demanding to identify the owner of the boots, knowing that the supervisor was there to "check up" on her and that poor classroom management would look bad in the supervisor's report. Unfortunately, the owner of the boots happened to be the supervising teacher herself, and Rita Green was extremely embarrassed.

But Rita Green's concern was not entirely misplaced. In addition to the assistance that supervising teachers provided, they reviewed job performance by the rural schoolteacher, including discipline exhibited by the class. Whispering, chewing gum, and disorder within the classroom were evidence that the rural schoolteacher was not doing a satisfactory job. Emphasis was also placed upon the teacher's lesson plans. Teachers were to make up their own plan books and adhere to them. A premium was placed upon coverage of a specified amount of material within the school year. To accomplish this, less imaginative teachers simply divided the number of pages in the textbook by the number of days in the school term.⁶⁴

The era of the one-room schools gradually came to the end as school consolidation was introduced. In 1908, President Theodore Roosevelt established the National Commission of Country Life in an attempt to find solutions for rural problems. One of the Commission's

⁶² Mary Crandel Interview, February 3, 1997.

⁶³ Cindy Johnson Interview, October 29, 1996.

⁶⁴ Rita Green Interview, November 5, 1996.

recommendations was that one-room schools should be consolidated into larger districts.⁶⁵ The pace of school consolidation increased after World War II and continued through the early 1960s.

Changes in society played an important role in this consolidation of rural schools. As population grew and industrialization increased, one-room schools became obsolete. They were no longer needed because rural communities had better access to bigger schools in the cities, especially as busing and other transportation networks developed. As professional educators and school administrators pushed for consolidation, country schools were gradually abandoned, closed, or incorporated into consolidated schools.

Apart from increases in costs, consolidation was resisted because of the challenge consolidation presented to local community control and values. By consolidating schools, reformers not only sent children out of their familiar communities to more remote schools, but those schools also instituted a set of values that might be alien to those of rural students.⁶⁶

Rural schools often fought consolidation for as long as they could. In 1958, Town Line School in Fond du Lac County received a letter stating that they should consolidate Joint District Number 7 with Rosendale and Springvale. The School Board called an emergency meeting to discuss the issue of consolidation and voted to “postpone consolidating for as long as possible.” In 1960, the School Board received another letter, this time demanding that they consolidate, and the school board voted to close the Town Line School.⁶⁷

One-room schools are an important part of Wisconsin’s rural heritage due to the role they played in educating, socializing, and democratizing its citizens. The one-room schools also played a role in the shaping of modern education. Modern educational concepts such as “open concept classroom,” “peer teaching,” and “individual learning center” all had their origins in the one-room schools.⁶⁸ Students attending a one-room school were given individual assignments to work on while the teacher spent more time with students who needed additional help. Older students helped the younger, reinforcing the content that they themselves had learned. Criticisms of rural schools focused on inadequate preparation of teachers, poor design and maintenance of

⁶⁵ Gulliford, *Country Schools*, 41.

⁶⁶ Gulliford, *Country Schools*, 45

⁶⁷ Town Line Board Minutes, July 1953-July 1959 (Letters contained within the record book).

⁶⁸ Andrew Gulliford, “The One-Room School Lives,” *Principal*, September 1985, 9-10.

the school buildings, and inefficient curriculum. Some county schools also did not provide much challenge because at times there might be only a single student in a grade.

In Wisconsin, these criticisms were not necessarily always valid. Many of the teachers had at least a two-year degree from either a university or a normal school. School buildings were generally the responsibility of the surrounding community, and most communities took pride in their schools and tried to keep them well maintained.

The one-room school is at the foundation of Wisconsin's current education system. Schools as institutions tend to mirror their society. As that society changes, institutions are altered in order to meet changing needs. Fond du Lac County's one-room schools reflected and served the demands of their rural community. As the community grew and became more urbanized, the one-room schools no longer met the needs and expectations of the community, and they gradually disappeared.

Appendix⁶⁹

One-room Schoolteachers Who Participated in the Interviews

<u>Teacher</u>	<u>Date Interviewed</u>	<u>Years teaching in a rural school</u>
Mary Crandel	2/3/97	1940-1954
Bonnie Dunn	1/1/97	NA
Rita Green	11/5/96	NA
Dotty Grange	10/31/96	1939-1948
Cindy Johnson	10/29/96	1956-1963
Maybelle Orion	1/23/97	1937-1956
Darlene Ries	10/29/96	1943-1949
Margaret Rhodes	10/10/96	1941-1954
Rob Turner	11/1/96	1938-1940
Eva Schrauth	12/17/96	1934-1940
Larry Smith	2/3/97	1936-1954
Elaine Walker	2/5/97	NA
Cathy Williams	1/9/97	1941-1945
Mary Beth Yeats	10/21/96	1939-?
Liza Zills	12/19/96	1935-1960

⁶⁹ All teachers interviewed were assigned pseudonyms in order to maintain confidentiality. Transcripts of the interviews are on deposit at the Adams House, Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

Fond du Lac's Anti-La Follette Movement, 1900-1905

Matthew J. Crane

During the early twentieth century, a major political force, Progressivism, reshaped American politics. At the forefront of this movement was the State of Wisconsin, and one of its foremost advocates was arguably Wisconsin's most famous political figure, Robert M. "Fighting Bob" La Follette. La Follette's political career was marked by many challenges and controversies. He was not uniformly popular across the State, and the issues that he championed did not resonate equally with all of its citizens. A typology of anti-La Follette voters from Wisconsin inevitably points to economic status, political party loyalty, ethnicity, and political philosophy as determinants. All of these groups combined during Robert La Follette's campaigns for Governor of Wisconsin to produce a significant "anti-La Follette movement." Fond du Lac was one of the more prominent cities in the State that was affected by this movement.

Robert La Follette based his 1900, 1902, and 1904 campaigns on two principal issues. The first of these issues was the need for election reform, to be achieved through the introduction of a direct primary system. La Follette adopted the concept of the direct primary to replace the existing caucus and convention system that was used to nominate political candidates. He saw this tactic as a way to lessen "bossism" and to bring grassroots politics back to the people and away from the control of political party leadership. The second issue was the need for railroad regulation in the State. La Follette's perspective was that "corporate arrogance" and "tax dodging" by railroads should be challenged, because the railroads did not pay their fair share to help support the workings of Wisconsin's government. According to La Follette, a fairer system could be attained through governmental regulation of the rates that the railroads charged their customers. These two issues played strongly in Wisconsin, and they generated much support for LaFollette's election bids. However, this was not the case in Fond du Lac, which tended to be a center of resistance to La Follette's message.

Both the primary and railroad rate issues were at the forefront of the La Follette platform in his campaigns from 1900 to 1904, but they were responsible for only a part of the anti-La Follette movement in Fond du Lac, for this movement had planted its roots even before he became Governor of Wisconsin in 1901. Fond du Lac's strong German heritage, La Follette's political enemies, and even some of his allies, were all players in the growth of the movement.

Robert M. (Fighting Bob) LaFollette, 1922

Ethnicity became a central factor in determining support or opposition to Robert La Follette in the politics of Fond du Lac and Wisconsin at the beginning of the twentieth century.

Robert Marion La Follette was born to Josiah La Follette and Mary Ferguson in Primrose, Wisconsin, in a log house, on June 14, 1855. In 1874, he attended the preparatory department of the University of Wisconsin, and he graduated from the University in 1879. That same year he entered the University's Law program, and in February 1880 he passed the State Bar Examination and opened a law office in Madison. In 1880, he won election as District Attorney for Dane County. Reelected in 1882, he practiced law for two more years, until his election as Congressman from the Third Congressional District. He served three terms in Congress until 1890, when he was renominated but lost the election, as did many other Republicans in that year. Reentering private life, La Follette reactivated his law practice as a senior member of La Follette, Harper, Roe and Zimmerman. The law practice dissolved in 1894, and he practiced alone until 1900, when he was elected Governor of Wisconsin.¹

The Fox Valley, with Fond du Lac at its southern edge, had a very large German-American population at the end of the nineteenth century. It was estimated that 31.1 per cent of the population of Fond du Lac County were of German heritage. Historically, the German-Americans of Fond du Lac tended to vote for the Democratic Party. Philosophically, they voted on the basis of defense of personal rights, that is, they opposed control by government that could interfere with their property and prosperity.² They had settled in areas of the state that were well suited to agriculture, and they employed diversified farming techniques. Many engaged in dairying, and these independent farmers formed a prosperous part of the Wisconsin economy, and of Fond du Lac in particular. Catholic Germans, many of them foresters, shepherds and farm workers, settled in towns like Oshkosh, Fond du Lac, and Menasha. Many had arrived between 1848 and 1854. Only in the 1870s did industrial workers from Germany begin settling in Wisconsin cities. Generally well-to-do, Wisconsin's German-American farmers tended to be apolitical, so long as their sense of personal autonomy was unchallenged. This was in marked contrast to Wisconsin residents of Scandinavian origin.³ In general, Wisconsin's German-Americans tended to political conservatism, promoting sound money, a protective tariff, support

¹ *The Blue Book Of The State Of Wisconsin* (Milwaukee, Wisconsin: 1903), 1069.

² Herbert F. Margulies, *Decline Of The Progressive Movement In Wisconsin* (Stevens Point, Wisconsin: Worzalla Publishing Co., 1968), 224.

³ Allen Fraser Lovejoy, *La Follette and the Establishment of the Direct Primary in Wisconsin* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1941), 14.

for their German-language homeland school system, and civil service reform. La Follette's backing among these people of German heritage was not as strong as was his link to the Scandinavian population of the state.

Scandinavians who had immigrated to Wisconsin after the Civil War settled on farm land that was less fertile than that occupied by the earlier-arriving Germans. Scandinavians in Wisconsin exhibited a very different pattern of voting and tended to be concerned with issues and conceptions of liberty and political rights, rather than personal rights. This difference tended to make them more active politically, due to their perceived need to better themselves in society. Wisconsin residents of Scandinavian descent formed a crucial power base for La Follette. Assemblyman Irvine L. Lenroot of Superior, in Bayfield County, whose parents came from Sweden, was a key figure in mobilizing voters of Scandinavian ancestry for La Follette.

Yet another group of Scandinavians, the Norwegians, had settled in Winnebago, Dane, Vernon, Pierce and Waupaca Counties. Norwegians supported lower tariffs and Granger cooperative legislation that tended to be politically progressive. La Follette's following among the Norwegians was catalyzed by his political ally, Nils P. Haugen, who was a native of Norway and the U. S. Congressman from River Falls, in Pierce County.⁴ Thus the relationships that La Follette established before and during his terms as Governor placed him squarely among the fault lines defined by ethnic and factional divisions within the diverse cultural population of Wisconsin.

The issues for which La Follette fought and which he was able to establish as the Republican platform during his gubernatorial campaigns became a driving force that produced a split in the Republican Party. La Follette campaigned actively on promises to establish railroad taxation and a direct primary election law. Traditionally, campaign promises from Wisconsin Republicans had been regarded as "campaign" issues, not as a basis for governing. The party leadership had no intention of keeping these promises that LaFollette had introduced. La Follette sought to change that tradition in Wisconsin politics, and he ended by revolutionizing the political system.

La Follette argued that taxation and regulation of the railroads, plus the need for election by direct primary, were features that were essential for every Wisconsin community's well-being. Railroad regulation and taxation were hard-fought and divisive issues in early twentieth century America, due to the power of monopolies and trusts in the transportation industry. At the time, railroad companies were taxed only on their earnings, not on property they owned, and

⁴ Lovejoy, 21.

this had a serious impact on communities that were dependent on property taxes. La Follette fought for taxation of railroad land and favored establishment of a commission to oversee the railroads and regulate the rates they charged to passengers and shippers. If railroad property were taxed instead of earnings, he argued, railroads could not cheat Wisconsin's government out of tax money that could be used to provide basic services to its people.

Many people in Fond du Lac saw the issue differently. They viewed railroad regulation and taxation of land as an infringement on the personal rights of local businesses, even though regulation might permit farmers and businessmen to get their products to market without paying the existing high or arbitrary freight rates.

The primary election issue also generated negative reactions in Fond du Lac. In 1900, the caucus and convention system then in effect in Wisconsin allowed caucus delegates from each county to send a representative to the County and State conventions. Convention delegates then voted for the individual they had been instructed to support. La Follette charged that corrupt use of money and influence by business interests and powerful individuals led delegates to change their votes, thereby disenfranchising the grassroots party members. As La Follette stated in a speech at Monroe,

You cannot bribe the people, but you can bribe delegates to a convention. Public sentiment is the public conscience, and when it is roused to demand any legislation, the forces which oppose it are crushed and destroyed.”⁵

Primary election, La Follette asserted, would permit nomination of officials without intervention from caucuses and conventions.⁶ Destroying the caucus and convention system, La Follette believed, would destroy corporate control of party nominations and place it in the hands of the people. La Follette also understood that direct primary elections would open the door to his own political future. In 1905, Fond du Lac was one of the first Wisconsin cities to use a direct primary in the spring election. Fond du Lac citizens' main concern about the primary system was its cost. It was claimed, inaccurately, that primaries cost more than the caucus and convention system. In fact, direct primary elections at that time were cheaper than the convention system, because one county might hold five or six different conventions for each party to elect its delegates to the state convention.

⁵ Lovejoy, 74; *Milwaukee Free Press*, October 12, 1902.

⁶ Ellen Torelle, *The Political Philosophy of Robert M. La Follette* (Madison, Wisconsin: Robert Marion La Follette Co., 1920), 28-29.

Still, the charge of a threat to the pocketbooks of the German-heritage voters of Fond du Lac had an impact. Many also opposed direct primaries because they believed such primaries violated their personal liberty and imposed policies that would undermine the existing political power distribution between traditional Democrats and Republicans. Decentralizing politics meant less control by the power brokers of Fond du Lac and more government regulation in the interest of less wealthy citizens. This, of course, was just what La Follette sought to do.

La Follette tried to counter this mindset by making an appeal to the German-American people of Wisconsin, especially to a group he characterized as “the German farmer.” He understood that the majority of Wisconsin’s population was rural, and he claimed that the voice of rural residents of the state was underrepresented. In 1901, the Wisconsin Legislature had 133 members, of whom only 31 were farmers. La Follette argued that 31 farmers were insufficient to reflect the 60 per cent of Wisconsin’s population who were rural. La Follette asserted that direct primaries would remedy this problem, for the farm vote would be more heavily felt in an election where there was direct vote by the people in a primary, whereas the cities’ centralized power would be more likely to be reflected in caucuses and conventions. La Follette believed that this message would appeal to farmers, who would share his view that city-bred politicians lacked the stamp of sincerity.⁷ His judgment was correct with respect to the economically disadvantaged Scandinavian-American farmers who occupied the poorer, stump-filled and swampy land in the northern part of Wisconsin. The wealthier, German-American farmers of the Fond du Lac area, however, saw La Follette’s plans as likely to reduce the value of their property rights.⁸ They also saw direct primaries as “Republican” legislation. Conservative German Democrats in Fond du Lac voted in their caucuses against La Follette.

The year 1903 was the most crucial for La Follette’s drive to enact a direct primary law. Many of the predominately German areas in Wisconsin were debating the bill and weighing its chances to pass in the legislature. Wealthier areas of the state tended to support the existing system. Surprisingly, Winnebago County, despite its strong German heritage, voted 60 per cent in favor of the direct primary, while Fond du Lac County voted only 49.9 per cent for the legislation. Winnebago County, of course, was still suffering from a collapse of its once-thriving lumber economy, and the loss of employment doubtless encouraged support for the bill.

⁷ Lovejoy, 72.

⁸ Lovejoy, 94.

Prospering and more diversified areas, such as Fond du Lac, tended to regard the primary bill as more threatening. The larger Norwegian population in Winnebago County also helped push the vote for the direct primary, whereas Fond du Lac's division over the bill was caused by the larger number of Democrat farmers and conservative Republican Party "Stalwarts" who opposed it.

Supporters included those who were called "fair-minded" Democrats and Republican "Half-breeds," so named by "Stalwart" Republicans due to their support of the La Follette cause. The racial epithet, common in the politics of the day, was applied because these individuals were seen as a threat to party loyalty on account of their support for progressive political views. "Stalwarts," as they liked to call themselves, were the members of the anti-La Follette faction of the Republican Party who opposed direct primaries and railroad regulation and taxation.

A typical Fond du Lac County farmer's objection to direct primaries was that any change in politics or in business and industry would have negative effects on Fond du Lac's economy. In comparison, ethnic Swedes, Finns and Norwegians, farming in the less prosperous western and central parts of the State, favored the bill, which passed by over 60 per cent in those areas. Farmers in those counties sought the same kind of prosperity that well-established areas like Fond du Lac already possessed.

Fond du Lac, during the La Follette era, had only a small Scandinavian population that had little or no effect on politics. Political conflict in the city tended to produce disagreement between German-American Democrats and German-American Republicans. Fond du Lac was a well-known stronghold of the Republican Party, but from 1900 to 1905, the city, divided over many issues, produced a fifty-fifty vote split between the two political parties. This political shift was triggered largely by negative reactions to La Follette.

German-American support for Governor La Follette was weakened in 1901, after he criticized what he considered the weak Hagemester Bill for primary election reform. That legislation would only have applied to county and city elections, excluding state and federal contests. This bill was thought by many Republicans to be a compromise response to the sweeping direct primary reform that La Follette advocated. La Follette noted that the bill would have no effect on nationally elected officials, only local politicians, and the newly elected governor saw it as a mockery of the direct primary legislation he sought. La Follette vetoed the bill, stating that it did not fulfill the promises of the Republican Party platform. The veto was important in initiating a factional struggle between La Follette and the "Stalwart" Republicans that would continue

throughout his three terms as governor. *Die Germania*, the leading German language newspaper published in Milwaukee, which had previously been friendly to La Follette, criticized him for the veto of the Hagemeister Bill, stating that he caused the split in the Republican Party.⁹ La Follette vetoed the bill to make the point that he would not compromise the principles embedded in the Republican Party's platform, even for the sake of unity within the organization. For Fond du Lac, this marked the beginning of a significant anti-La Follette movement that would not end until after La Follette's race for a third gubernatorial term in 1904.

At the beginning of the twentieth century, the German-American population of Fond du Lac was divided in its party loyalties. Large numbers of German-Americans voted Republican, despite the fact that before the Civil War most of Fond du Lac's Germans had been Democrats. The slavery issue temporarily converted many to support Republicans, although a majority reverted to the Democratic Party after the war.¹⁰ Of course La Follette's politics divided not only the Republicans but also the Democrats, the former according to principle, the latter according to politics. As one historian put it, "As Napoleon disarmed a possible menace by keeping the German states divided against one another, La Follette did the same with the Democratic Party."¹¹

During La Follette's five years as Governor, politics typically were played out between the self-styled "Stalwart" Republicans of the old faction and the "Half-breeds." Democrats during the era were divided over issues and generally not effective in State politics. La Follette relied heavily on "fair minded" or cross-over Democrats for votes throughout the State. In Fond du Lac and other heavily German-American areas, the "personal liberty" issue could become a La Follette strength, because the concept of personal liberty tended to erode party loyalty or ideology. One Fond du Lac commentator observed that, "Governor La Follette [is a man] who can change himself into a Democrat among Democrats, a Republican among Republicans, a Populist among Populist, and a Socialist among Socialists."¹²

Fond du Lac, as we have seen, was well established at the beginning of the century as a Republican city with a conservative bent. La Follette spoke many times in Fond du Lac during his first term as Governor, talking on his favorite issues of railroad regulation and the need for the direct primary, two very popular issues, statewide, for the Republican platform, but divisive

⁹ Marguillies, 56.

¹⁰ Lovejoy, 14-15.

¹¹ Albert O. Barton, *La Follette's Winning Of Wisconsin (1894-1904)* (Iowa: The Homestead Co., 1922), 230.

¹² *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, November 2, 1902.

for both the Republican and Democratic Parties in Fond du Lac. The split of the Republican Party opened the way for “fair-minded” Democrats to cross party lines to vote for La Follette.

The two major local newspapers, the *Daily Reporter* and the *Daily Commonwealth*, played an important part in the anti-La Follette sentiment that developed in Fond du Lac, for they helped develop public opinion regarding the Governor’s actions in the State of Wisconsin and the Fox Valley. The *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter* supported Democrats aligned against La Follette, and its coverage illustrates the anti-La Follette movement from the Democratic German-American point of view. The *Daily Commonwealth*, on the other hand, was a “Stalwart” Republican newspaper. The *Daily Commonwealth* never again fully supported La Follette after the split he caused in the Republican Party in 1901. The newspaper combined support for strong Republican Party politics with sympathy for the German heritage of many residents in the Fond du Lac community. Since party unity was the key platform plank for many Fond du Lac Republicans of German descent, the *Daily Commonwealth* took a pro-La Follette stance only on those occasions when he acted in unity with the views of “Stalwart” Republicans.

Both papers played an important part in the shifting patterns of party politics in Fond du Lac during the La Follette gubernatorial years. The *Commonwealth* argued that two years as governor were enough and that La Follette should step aside. The *Daily Reporter* typically suggested that La Follette wanted to take personal rights away from the people. The one common idea that both papers supported was the importance of party politics and unity in voting. This idea was anathema to La Follette, who saw such slavish devotion to party as leading to political corruption. The influence of the two newspapers was not always decisive, as is suggested by voting patterns that show the numbers of Republicans and Democrats who crossed party lines in each of La Follette’s three election campaigns for Governor, especially during the 1904 contest, but they were an important source of public information.

La Follette’s 1904 campaign for a third gubernatorial term was the most striking of the three electoral races in terms of newspaper editorial activity. In 1904, the *Daily Commonwealth* openly supported the candidacy of Samuel A. Cook, the “Stalwart” candidate for Governor, a former member of Congress who resided in Winnebago County. Cook promised that he would not vote on “factional lines or use Democratic votes to be elected.”¹³ The editor of the *Commonwealth* wrote, “the party should be rehabilitated[;] the sentiment against a third La Follette term

¹³ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 11, 1904.

is very strong in the state, Fond du Lac Counties [sic] sentiment to support Mr. Cook has grown.”¹⁴ At the State Convention in Madison, Republicans were divided even further after the Stalwart Republicans bolted the convention, protesting that the La Follette party had not been legally organized.

Stalwarts then met at the Fuller Opera House to nominate their candidate, Cook, for Governor.¹⁵ Who would officially be placed on the Republican ballot was a matter eventually decided by the Wisconsin Supreme Court. On October 5, 1904, the Court ruled that La Follette’s name must be placed on the ballot as the Republican candidate, and the Stalwarts thereupon formed the National Republicans, headed by United States Senators John C. Spooner and Joseph V. Quarles, as an organization to oppose La Follette. Senator Spooner, a Stalwart Republican from Madison, was well known as a polished debater and constitutional lawyer. Spooner had been elected to the United States Senate in 1896 and held the position until his retirement in 1907.¹⁶ Senator Joseph V. Quarles of Kenosha, a member of one of Milwaukee’s political businessmen’s groups, had been elected to the Senate in 1899. Soon after the court decision declaring La Follette the Republican nominee, Cook dropped out of the race, forcing ex-Governor (1897-1901) Edward Scofield of Oconto to replace him. The shift from the local candidate, Cook, to Scofield badly hurt Republican Party fortunes in Fond du Lac, and many Stalwart Republicans in the city were angered that, once again, it seemed that the strength of the Republican Party had been compromised by La Follette and his “Half-breeds.”

The *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* vigorously supported the National Republican leaders, underlining the strength of the Stalwart cause in the city and the significant anti-La Follette movement, whose goal on the State level was to restore traditional Republican Party politics in Wisconsin. Prior to a 1904 Quarles speaking engagement in the city, the *Commonwealth* pointedly observed that, “Fond du Lac should be friendly to Senator Quarles, [for] he has always been loyal to the interests of the city.”¹⁷

In a last effort to oust La Follette, both the *Commonwealth* and *Daily Reporter* printed a letter, signed by 200 of Fond du Lac’s citizens and businessmen, addressed to the voters of Fond du Lac city and county urging his defeat in the 1904 election. The letter stated:

¹⁴ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, April 8, 1904.

¹⁵ Barton, 359-364.

¹⁶ Lovejoy, 20.

¹⁷ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, November 1, 1904.

It becomes our duty to work and to vote for the interests of our own people, regardless of party affiliation. While we recognize that the right to regulate and control railroads belongs to the people and to this end we favor stringent and just laws governing the same, we deny the right to delegate this most important power to the arbitrary dictations of any one man[,] which is what Governor La Follette asks for in his railroad commission and wherein he declares that the people cannot be trusted to do their full duty. It is self-evident to every citizen that the condition of our city today is primarily due to the location of the great railroad shops and division headquarters at North Fond du Lac at an expenditure of over one million five hundred thousand dollars.”¹⁸

Obviously, the anti-La Follette movement was tied to the economic interests of Fond du Lac and to one of its principal industries. From Fond du Lac, the railroads snaked eastward to Sheboygan, southwest to Madison, northward to Oshkosh, Appleton, and Green Bay, and southward to Milwaukee. Not only was Fond du Lac economically and politically tied to the railroads, but its merchants and farmers benefited from their location near an important railroad division point. Businesses in the city received preferential shipping rates and access to many markets. Establishment of a railroad commission was likely to mean regulated rates and most likely higher shipping costs for businesses in Fond du Lac. And of course there was the remarkable, not to say amazing, argument that La Follette was taking away both Fond du Lac’s property and its citizens’ personal and individual rights to regulate the railroad companies themselves.

La Follette’s opponents in Fond du Lac framed the struggle in terms of personal liberty at odds with political liberty, somehow associating the idea of political liberty with reduced loyalty to political party. The *Commonwealth* criticized the split in Republican Party and the *Daily Reporter* voiced its dislike for La Follette’s challenge to Democratic Party loyalty. As Republican Senator Quarles stated to a Fond du Lac audience, he was shocked by La Follette having said, “It is better to vote for a good Democrat rather than a bad Republican.”¹⁹

Both the *Reporter* and the *Commonwealth* typically used every opportunity to advance the anti-La Follette movement in the Fox Valley in order to undermine the progressive La Follette platform. While the *Commonwealth* supported former Governor Scofield, in 1904, the Democrats supported George W. Peck of Milwaukee, another former Governor of Wisconsin, who had served from 1891 to 1895, but who was defeated for reelection in 1894.²⁰

¹⁸ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* and *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, November 4, 1904.

¹⁹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, November 7, 1904.

²⁰ *The Blue Book Of The State Of Wisconsin* (1891), 575.

La Follette made many appearances in Fond du Lac during his years as Governor of Wisconsin, always drawing large crowds of both Democrats and Republicans and speaking in general terms on his favorite issues of the direct primary and railroad. The anti-La Follette sentiment in Fond du Lac had always been present, as it had in most other urban areas of the State. The anti-La Follette forces continued to portray the Governor as a threat to personal liberty and a disrupter of party unity. The attack on La Follette and his “Half-breeds” came from many newspapers in the State, such as the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* and the *Janesville Gazette*.

The German-American community in Fond du Lac had identified La Follette as a threat to their interests even before he became Governor, largely due to his affiliation with ex-Governor William D. Hoard of Fort Atkinson, whom La Follette considered an essential ally, due to the strong support Hoard enjoyed among farmers. Hoard, the editor and founder of *Hoard's Dairyman*, a periodical published in Fort Atkinson, had a large following among dairy farmers in Wisconsin. But Governor Hoard and a Republican-dominated legislature had passed the Bennett Law in 1889, a measure that prescribed mandatory schooling for all children. Hoard stated that he wanted legislation that would put children in school instead of in factories.

While this might appear to be a rather benign piece of legislation, the drawback to the Bennett Law, from the perspective of the German-American community, was that all Wisconsin school children were to be taught in the English language. Both Catholic and Lutheran Germans saw this as a threat to their parochial school systems that utilized the German language for much instruction. German Lutheran Churches and the Democratic Party led a march against Hoard, while the old-guard Republican Party claimed the Hoardites were “nativists” and suggested the next issue would be prohibition, both matters likely to inflame German-Americans who were sensitive to anti-immigrant legislation and to threats to their right to drink alcoholic beverages.²¹ During the last weeks of the 1900 campaign, this charge was used to get German-American Democrats to vote against La Follette. When the *Milwaukee Sentinel* attacked Louis G. Bohmrich, from Kenosha, the 1900 Democratic candidate for Governor, the *Fond du Lac Reporter* responded that this was a “futile desire to check the increasing tide of German support for Bohmrich by a silly attempt to excite racial prejudice against him.” According to the

²¹ David P. Thelen, *The New Citizenship, Origins of Progressivism in Wisconsin, 1885-1900* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1972), 52.

Reporter, the *Sentinel*'s attack only served to remind the German people that La Follette's supporters were

part and parcel of the regime that attempted only a decade ago to place upon them a restriction of their sacred rights, and has reawakened the impulses which aroused them to that memorable effort for the overthrow of their would-be oppressors. Because they asserted their right to cherish their language and racial traditions the *Sentinel* evidently thought they would consider it a crime for one of their number to love America more than Germany and thereby betrayed its opinion that the German people were disloyal to American institutions—the same hallucination that led to the passage of that detested coercive educational measure known as the Bennett Law.²²

A year after the Bennett Law was passed, in 1890, the Democrats won back control of the State Legislature in Wisconsin, and Republicans, including La Follette, who held seats in Congress also lost their races. The Bennett Law left among German-Americans a residual distrust of the Republicans, especially in Fond du Lac, and the Bennett Law was one of the main reasons La Follette was seen as a threat to Fond du Lac, even before he became Governor.

La Follette had other political problems in Fond du Lac. One of the most significant was his reluctance to endorse United States Senator John Spooner for reelection in 1902. People of German heritage regarded Spooner as one of Wisconsin's greatest assets in the political arena. Aligned with the Republican cause, Spooner endorsed German-American candidates, and he recognized the strength and influence of the ethnic group's voting power, particularly in crucial areas such as Fond du Lac, where party strength of Republicans in the November 1902 election was especially important. Men like William H. Froehlich, Republican congressional candidate from Washington County, who was also La Follette's Secretary of State, relied on the Republican Party endorsement. Spooner stated in a speech in Fond du Lac, "He [W. Froehlich] is a German-American and there is no better American anywhere." Spooner also endorsed the Republican ticket fully in both the state and in the nation saying, "Stand by your party and vote for Governor La Follette and all the Republican ticket."²³

Six days earlier La Follette had paid tribute to Senator Spooner in a speech given in Fond du Lac, but he did not endorse the State ticket as a whole, a stance he maintained throughout the campaign of 1902. Nine days after La Follette's speech in Fond du Lac he spoke in Appleton. The gap between Stalwart Republicans and the "Half-breeds" had been widening steadily since

²² *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, October 11, 1900.

²³ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, October 23, 1902.

La Follette had first become Governor of Wisconsin in 1901. At the end of a speech, a reporter requested the opportunity to ask a question, and the Governor agreed to his request:

Governor, in view of the brilliant record made by Senator Spooner, to which you have eloquently referred in your speech, and in view of the splendid campaign he is making for the entire Republican ticket, are you in favor of the unconditional reelection of Senator Spooner to the United States Senate?

Governor La Follette replied:

I am for the success and for the principles of the Republican party, and the day and the hour that Senator Spooner raises his voice for the principles of the Republican party, as laid down in the state platform, I will raise my voice for his reelection to the United States Senate; because I then can do so in conformity with the platform of my party.²⁴

This statement probably cost La Follette many votes across the State, and in Fond du Lac particularly, because the city's residents had great respect for Senator Spooner and his dedication to the principle of party unity. This was only one of many steps La Follette took in separating the "Half-breed" Republicans from the Stalwart Republicans, but it was a definitive breaking point between Fond du Lac and La Follette, at least in terms of political support for him from local newspapers. The Stalwart *Daily Commonwealth* took a more aggressive anti-La Follette view even than the *Democratic Reporter*. But Fond du Lac generally viewed La Follette's politics within the traditional context of Democrat versus Republican. La Follette's issue-orientated politics were either incomprehensible to them or else seemed irrelevant. Other newspapers around the state that had been friendly to La Follette also changed their views, once he openly declined to support the popular Senator Spooner. The reelection of Spooner as an issue was particularly visible in Oshkosh, where the *Oshkosh Northwestern*, a former La Follette supporter, began to distance itself from the Governor in an editorial stating, "Spooner should be endorsed." The *Oshkosh Northwestern* still supported the reelection of La Follette, but it took the position that it was easier to find gubernatorial timber than another fine Senator like Spooner.²⁵ The Oshkosh newspaper was not alone in regarding Spooner so highly, for a majority of Fox Valley editors shared this outlook.

During this period La Follette remained associated with the Republican Party although his ideas were more progressive than those of many Republicans. But he still looked to both

²⁴ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, October 27, 1902.

²⁵ Barton, 191.

parties for votes, and such disregard for party lines did not play well in Fond du Lac. Both newspapers printed warnings about crossover voting on the ballot, and Republicans and Democrats both urged voting a straight ticket in general. The straight ticket vote was even more important for the areas where there was a heavy German-American population, because these were the areas where party politics was power. In the 1904 election, La Follette took votes from both Democrats and Republicans, with the vote for him coming about evenly from Democrats and Republicans. Forty-six per cent of Fond du Lac County voters voted Republican in 1904, down eight per cent from 1900.²⁶ The strong Fond du Lac support for Senator Spooner was important in carrying the Republican ticket to victory, but it also helped that La Follette received votes from the “fair-minded” Democrats to compensate for the split in Republican ranks that drove “borderline” Republicans to shift their votes to the Democrats or the National Republicans.

The campaign of 1904 was one of the most difficult for La Follette. He won the gubernatorial race by only forty-five thousand votes, the slimmest margin of victory in his three statewide campaigns for office.²⁷ La Follette spoke in many towns and cities during the campaign of 1904, but he did not come to Fond du Lac to give a speech on railroad legislation and primary reform. Had the *Commonwealth, Daily Reporter* and people of Fond du Lac who opposed railroad legislation reform heard La Follette speak, perhaps the attitude toward his campaign platform in 1904 might have been friendlier.

One of the reasons such a speech wasn't made may be the fact that La Follette's staff never researched and developed the materials that would have permitted the Governor to speak specifically on Fond du Lac's railroads and commerce. Material was prepared for Oshkosh, Omro, Sheboygan, Plymouth, Appleton and Neenah-Menasha, all areas in the Fox Valley, yet Fond du Lac was never a target of concern, and no analysis was prepared for La Follette to use there. Such a speech would certainly have generated interest from the people of Fond du Lac, and perhaps it would have garnered more support for the cause of railroad regulation had the Governor presented his side of the issue in person, especially when local newspapers frequently editorialized on the issue of railroad regulation in a vein that was generally critical of La Follette's stance.

²⁶ James R. Donoghue, *How Wisconsin Voted 1848-1954* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1956), 88.

²⁷ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, November 9, 1904.

In twenty Wisconsin cities, editors had compiled statistics on the railroads in order to challenge La Follette's claims. Of the twenty, nine stand out because La Follette's staff had not done research for these particular areas. Those nine cities were Racine, Whitewater, Ripon, Hudson, Waupaca, Wausau, Lodi, Wauwatosa and Fond du Lac.²⁸ All of these cities were heavily dependent on the railroads. La Follette did not give a speech on railroad regulation in any of them, probably because there were few votes to be won on the issue in those places. Wausau, one of the areas with a heavy German-American Democratic population, was similarly ignored by the La Follette campaign. The reason must have been that these cities' voters depended on the railroads or benefited from the existing rate structure, thus rendering La Follette's message less effective.

These omissions, however, left La Follette open to attacks upon himself and left his campaign open to unanswered challenges to his call for better railroad regulation. Perhaps his charisma might have carried the day before audiences in such places; it is a significant fact that, where La Follette was well known, he always received more support from the electorate. In the elections of 1902 and 1904, the counties he visited all heavily supported him, while the ones he did not visit were often hostile towards him.²⁹ Perhaps he was astute enough to understand which areas were ripe for his message, yet a speech aimed at Fond du Lac would have been important, because of its location and the importance of the railroad to the community. La Follette's demand that the railroads be taxed on land they owned might mean more expensive shipping costs for Fond du Lac's people and industries, but La Follette sought change so railroads could not discriminate between richer and poorer areas of the state and would be prevented from driving the price of shipping too high anywhere in the state. Such a change probably would not have benefited Fond du Lac's farmers, but the Governor at least would have been able to make his case for the fairness of his proposal. Because he did not speak to the situation in Fond du Lac, the anti-La Follette movement in the city was able to characterize the demand for regulation in the convoluted form of an "infringement on personal liberty which could undermine their way of life," ignoring the broader economic debate. La Follette's presence might have brought the real economic issues more into focus and at least would have

²⁸ Barton, 412.

²⁹ Barton, 196.

made the people of Fond du Lac confront the question of the inequity of the existing system to other citizens of the State.

The election campaign of 1904 included other controversial incidents that reinforced the anti-La Follette movement. One incident that happened in Fond du Lac involved La Follette supporters' efforts to take attention away from Senator Joseph V. Quarles' speech, scheduled for November 5. Reports were released that La Follette himself would be speaking at Turner Hall the same night that Senator Quarles planned to speak. The *Daily Reporter* printed, "Little Bob Is Coming, Finally Concludes To Speak To People Of Fond du Lac."³⁰ After it was announced that La Follette would speak in Fond du Lac, attention was diverted away from Senator Quarles' speech at the Crescent Opera House. The next day, prominent local Republicans in Fond du Lac asked voters to oppose La Follette in the upcoming election, while the newspapers were announcing his visit, scheduled for Saturday night.

Whether La Follette ever actually intended to speak in Fond du Lac during the campaign remains an open question. Announcements were sent out to all factories and businesses throughout the city, and arrangements for the use of Turner Hall were made. The *Commonwealth* and *Reporter* printed an article a day before La Follette was to speak. But La Follette chose not to come to Fond du Lac and instead spoke that night in Madison. This was not an uncommon practice for him; his campaign would reserve two or three places to speak and then would announce at the last minute that he would be unable to attend. As noted previously, by 1904, La Follette's staff had not developed the relevant information on railroad rates for him to use in a speech in Fond du Lac, so perhaps he never intended to appear.

The failure to appear itself became an issue locally. Democrats and Stalwart Republicans wrote articles stating that La Follette had misled the people of Fond du Lac. "Deceived The People, Governor La Follette did not intend to come to Fond du Lac," proclaimed a headline that asserted La Follette's purpose had been to try to keep people away from the Quarles meeting at the Crescent Opera House.³¹

A La Follette campaign representative had in fact appeared at the Turner Hall meeting. Assistant Secretary of State Fred M. Miner had been sent in La Follette's place, but the problem with a relatively insignificant figure like Miner was that no one really seemed to know who he

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, November 3, 1904.

³¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, November 4, 1904.

was. The *Reporter* argued that, if Miner were an important speaker, someone would have heard of him, and the paper returned to the theme that La Follette had not given a speech in Fond du Lac during the 1904 campaign. Given the two speakers appearing in Fond du Lac on that Saturday evening, the unknown Miner and the well-known Senator Quarles, many more people naturally went to hear Quarles, who enjoyed considerable local support.

La Follette's campaign strategy really did not consider the city of Fond du Lac as a major threat to his reelection. Where the German-American Democrat population was large, La Follette assumed that, if he lost the Stalwart Republican vote, he would make up for it with crossover voters from the Democratic Party. This had been less true for the elections of 1900 and 1902, for party unity among the Republicans and Democrats had been still relatively strong in those elections, though the 1902 election had involved a more significant threat from the Democrats. In the campaign of 1904, "Stalwart" Republicans in many cities like Fond du Lac mounted a vigorous anti-La Follette movement, but the Democratic defections to La Follette also grew in number.

La Follette may have made a mistake by speaking in Madison rather than in Fond du Lac on November 4, for the latter city would have presented a field in which to win fresh converts, whereas Dane County was already a La Follette bastion. Making a speech in Fond du Lac might have improved his vote in the County. Forty-eight per cent of the voters had favored Republicans in 1902, while the percentage dropped to only forty-six in 1904.³² As it was, La Follette gained nothing from the "hypothetical" appearance, while he presented his foes with an issue when he did not give his advertised speech.

Voting statistics show a decline in La Follette's popularity in Fond du Lac during his three gubernatorial races, yet comparing the three races in terms of votes does not show the real effect of the anti-La Follette movement. If La Follette's name had been placed on the ballot as a Progressive, competing with Democrat and Republican candidates, it would be easier to determine in retrospect exactly who voted for which candidate. But since La Follette's faction ran on the Republican Party ticket, only general inferences concerning cross voting between parties can be made. In the 1904 election, La Follette lost the city of Fond du Lac by 553 votes out of 4,151 people voting.³³ In 1902, La Follette had lost the city by 348 votes out of 3,488, whereas in

³² Donoghue, 87-88.

³³ *The Blue Book Of The State Of Wisconsin*, (1905), 319.

1900, he had lost by only 105 out of 3,725 votes cast.³⁴ Although he carried Fond du Lac County in 1900, La Follette did not carry it either in 1902 or in 1904. The statistics do not permit extensive analysis of cross voting between Democrats and Republicans, but it is clear that defections from the Republicans allowed the Democrats, who otherwise were not very strong in the state, to win a majority in Fond du Lac during the last two La Follette races for the governorship.

Both the anti-La Follette and the Progressive movements were significant in Fond du Lac, but the anti-La Follette movement proved somewhat stronger. La Follette knew that cross voting from party to party would be a critical factor in his 1904 candidacy, and it certainly made a difference in Fond du Lac. German-Americans tended to vote in favor of what the local newspapers termed “personal liberty,” or “laissez faire,” because of their privileged economic status, whereas other Wisconsin ethnic groups tended to respond to La Follette’s call to economic fairness and democracy. The German-American tendency to vote according to a philosophy of “personal liberty” made them politically less reliable than Scandinavians, because the German-Americans were more likely to cross party lines to vote for whomever they regarded as guarding those personal rights. The Progressive Era was at its birth in the factional struggles during these Wisconsin elections in the first decade of the twentieth century. Absence of a large Scandinavian population in Fond du Lac left local politics in the hands of an anti-La Follette movement that faced little opposition. The stage for the anti-La Follette movement in Fond du Lac had been set well before La Follette became Governor. A clash of philosophical and political values that masked real economic disputes, and the emergence of ethnic politics through La Follette’s choice of William Hoard as an ally, laid the groundwork for the anti-La Follette movement. Events after La Follette was elected only accented and reshaped the political struggle that marked Wisconsin politics during his tenure as Governor.

³⁴ *The Blue Book Of The State Of Wisconsin*, (1903), 402.

*Union Soldiers Monument, Fond du Lac,
(Early 20th Century Postcard)*

“Tin Soldier:” Fond du Lac’s Courthouse Square Union Soldiers Monument

Ann Martin

Communities often are defined by what they choose to memorialize and to emphasize publicly about themselves. Visitors to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin are likely to be directed to many points of historical interest and civic pride within the community. Plaques designate historical events and legend, and they denote significant architecture. Monuments salute industry and transportation developments. Museums encapsulate memorable portions of the County’s past.

Among these symbols are three major monumental statues honoring soldiers and recalling military conflicts. Two of these monuments depict Union soldiers from the American Civil War, while the other is a Spanish American War soldier. These monuments, by themselves, are certainly nothing outstanding or even unusual, for similar statues are to be found gracing town greens and courthouse squares in many communities around the country. But Fond du Lac’s statuary does have an unusual distinction, for in this community the establishment of these memorials early in the twentieth century affected lives, produced acrimony, and stirred civic passions of an unintended sort.

While each community shapes its own memorials and monuments, they are typically broadly reflective of larger community values. Nationalism and civic pride are the usual reasons that stir the people of a community to erect a monument and to cherish it as a symbol of membership in a group or of shared historical experience. In Fond du Lac’s case, the circumstances surrounding the acquisition of the monument located in Veteran’s Park on Main Street near Third Street produced a quite different response from the community. To look at the statue, one would never think that something so ordinary and benign, so typically small-town American, could have caused a community furor and a county-wide scandal. But Fond du Lac’s monument scandal took months to resolve, and the memories of it lasted for years.

The monument’s origins are rooted in broadly held American attitudes that reflected a community’s coming of age. Nationalism was a widely embraced American sentiment of the late 1800s and early 1900s, when Fond du Lac citizens voted to erect a Civil War Monument. Building grand and imposing civic monuments had become a nationwide fad, especially in those states in which many men had been killed in the War and whose veterans had attained positions

of importance and influence in their communities. The country had just recovered from an economic panic, and many communities were prospering in an unprecedented fashion. Those who had fought in the Civil War were now in positions as community leaders and could lobby their fellow citizens in support of monuments to commemorate what had been, for most, the defining experience of their lives. Industrialization was making strides, especially in the East, and this made it easier for the manufacture of such imposing monuments. With the American railroad network growing, it was also easier to transport these large statues to many cities and towns that did not possess a major foundry. As a typical response to growing nationalism and prosperity, Fond du Lac citizens, too, decided to erect a Civil War monument.

Of course, the United States, Wisconsin, and Fond du Lac were not the initiators in this movement to commemorate military sacrifice and glory. Its origins in Western Civilization may still be seen in the archaeological remains of monumental statues of Egypt, votive offerings of Greece, and triumphal arches of Rome. In the modern era, the rise of nationalism had provided a renewed impulse for such constructions. One can trace the linkage between American nationalist sentiment and monument building to the origins of the nationalist movement in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Europe. Countries such as Germany, France, and England had sparked its beginnings. Early forms of nationalism took on an aura of reverence that approximated religious faith. Rulers and governments of these countries used nationalism as a means to motivate their citizens and in many cases to create for them a new sense of shared identity. Nationalist rituals and visible symbols helped people to form bonds of unity and to show loyalty toward their country. For governments, the goal was a committed populace and soldiery. Powerful symbols and ceremonies, including monuments celebrating military exploits, played a major role in educating people to accept their new identities as citizens in a nation. The impressive character of these symbols and ceremonies also gave a sense of justification to those who had participated in the events commemorated and imparted a sense of legitimacy upon the existing order. With the right incentives, people would do anything to support a cause that could be construed as protecting their home, their family, and their homeland.¹

Perhaps the central formative event in the creation of a sense of American national consciousness was the Civil War. During the nineteenth century, it was certainly the most

¹ George L. Mosse, *The Nationalization of the Masses: Political Symbolism and Mass Movements in Germany From The Napoleonic Wars Through the Third Reich* (New York: Howard Fertig, Inc., 1975), 16-17.

energizing effort producing a shared commitment to a particular goal for millions of Americans, the preservation of the Union. And the loss of life in proportion to the total population of the country has been unequalled, before or since. So it is no wonder that, at the end of the nineteenth century and the beginning of the twentieth century, expressions of American nationalism should take the form of erecting monuments to symbolize this important historical experience as part of the exercise of nation-building.

Such monuments usually included rituals, and these practices typically were initiated through dedication ceremonies. Civic leaders delivered speeches, veterans proudly reminisced, and military personnel and enthusiastic youths paraded. This sort of dedication was clearly what the city fathers of Fond du Lac had planned to do with their new Union Soldiers Monument in 1902. Communities like Fond du Lac traditionally employed patriotic organizations and charismatic individuals in order to foster the nationalist and patriotic spirit in the people in ways that would energize and legitimize their own communities.

Fond du Lac was certainly in good company at this time. Probably one of the most common expressions of American nationalism in the late 1890s and early 1900s was the erection of monuments celebrating Civil War battles and the veterans of the War. This was a practice shared by large and small communities alike. Many of the Southern States, towns, and cities, where the majority of the battles had been fought, were among the first to commission such Civil War monuments. The creation of these memorials had itself been affected by the process of industrialization. Monuments almost identical to the one that stands in Veterans Park in Fond du Lac were manufactured and distributed in mass quantity. Entrepreneurs in the foundry business became wealthy making and installing these statues.²

A monument, by definition, is something built or placed to commemorate a person, a group, an event, or a movement. In the case of Fond du Lac's Union Soldiers Monument, the statue was intended to commemorate a blend of several of these purposes. The idealized soldier celebrated various organizations within or linked to the Civil War-era military or to veterans organizations, recalled the sacrifice of those who had participated, and made specific reference to certain victorious battles of the Civil War in which large numbers of men from Fond du Lac had participated.

² Mildred C. Baruch and Ellen J. Bechman, *Civil War Union Monuments* (Washington, D.C.: Daughters of Union Veterans of the Civil War, 1978), 176.

The decision to erect a Civil War monument in Fond du Lac was sparked by a death. Mark Harrison, a successful and well-loved local artist, left a legacy to the city that would strikingly change the appearance of its central square. Harrison had been born in Yorkshire, England, in 1819, and was trained as an artist in Canada, where he successfully pursued a career as a painter. At the urging of his brother, Harrison moved to Oshkosh, Wisconsin, where he invested in a steamboat company in 1849. This company soon failed, and Harrison lost about \$10,000, a large sum of money at that time.

Following this initial financial setback, he made his way to Fond du Lac, where he established residence and set up a studio near the downtown area. There he worked on his oil paintings and welcomed famous visitors who came to see him. To Fond du Lac residents, he was a world-class artist in their midst and was greatly celebrated. Mark Harrison evidently enjoyed spending leisure time at the Courthouse Square (a park area near the Court House), where he sat and watched the people pass. On his death in 1894, he bequeathed \$1,500 to Fond du Lac for the installation of a clock tower on the Fond du Lac Courthouse and \$500 for the erection of a Civil War monument.³

The clock tower project was completed first. As a symbol of the city's growing affluence and a hallmark of its entry into the modern world governed by time, the clock in its tower stood for many years as the community's most public timekeeper. The clock tower was dismantled in the early 1960s when the decision was made to demolish and replace the outmoded and rapidly deteriorating Courthouse. For years it had been a much loved community hallmark, and older residents still remember it with great nostalgia and tell stories of walking home while hearing the clock chiming the hour or half hour.

The Civil War monument followed a few years later, delayed perhaps because the Harrison bequest amounted to "seed money" rather than a sum that was likely to cover the entire cost of the monument project. On June 7, 1901, a committee of County Executive Board members was formed to raise additional funds and to decide on a design for the Civil War monument. The committee consisted of M. M. Finnegan, a Fond du Lac grocer, Peter McGalloway, a farmer who lived near Dotyville, and John Miles, a Ripon florist. As the Union Soldiers Monument Committee members began their work, they called on several companies for price estimates and

³ Mark Harrison, *Last Will and Testament*, October 2, 1894, Fond du Lac County Courthouse.

confirmed that a monument would cost about \$6,000, far more than the amount of the Harrison bequest.⁴

The next step was to raise the remainder of the funds to pay for the monument. As it seemed improbable that so much money could be raised from donations, the committee decided to call for a county-wide referendum on the use of tax money to pay up to \$5,000 of the bill. The difference, the committee proposed, would be made up from donations by interested organizations such as the Grand Army of The Republic (G.A.R.), The Womens' Relief Corps (W.R.C.), the Union Veterans' League (U.V.L.), and by gifts from other interested persons.⁵

The G.A.R. was a society composed of men who had fought for the North in the Civil War. The society was founded April 6, 1866, less than a year after the end of the war, and Fond du Lac's chapter was formed shortly after the national society came into existence. This society's main purpose was to promote fellowship among the men, to honor those killed in the war, and to provide care and help to their dependents. Their social and political objectives were to do relief work among veterans and to lobby for pension legislation that would benefit war veterans. The society continued to exist in Fond du Lac until 1956, when the organization terminated due to the death of its last member. One of the more notable and lasting efforts of the group was to lobby for the establishment of Memorial Day as a national holiday.

The W.R.C. was also a national society. One of the oldest women's patriotic organizations, the W.R.C. was founded in July 1883 as an auxiliary of the G.A.R. Membership was defined solely on the basis of "loyal womanhood," regardless of kinship to those who fought in the war. Two of the main objectives of the W.R.C. were to aid and to memorialize the G.A.R. and to perpetuate the memory of its dead. Members would assist veterans of all wars of the United States, as well as promote universal liberty, equal rights, and love of country.

The U.V.L. was formed to help the veterans of the Civil War. Such organizations helped to keep the memories of those who fought and died in the Civil War alive for their survivors. One way the organization did this was to sponsor monuments honoring the dead. They usually did this by donating money to a fund or by rallying public support, and this is just what all of these organizations did in Fond du Lac.

⁴ Executive Board Minutes, June 1901, Fond du Lac County Courthouse.

⁵ Executive Board Minutes, November 1901, Fond du Lac County Courthouse.

The referendum for the use of tax money to purchase the monument was put to the people of Fond du Lac County on April 1, 1902. County-wide, the proposition passed easily, by a margin of 456 votes. The final count was 3,100 (54%) for and 2,644 (46%) against. While the City of Fond du Lac itself passed the referendum by an overwhelming number of votes, some of the outlying areas rejected the idea of taxpayer support for the erection of the statue by more substantial margins. For example, Lamartine, a small village near Fond du Lac, voted 38 (16%) for and 204 (84%) against the project. In the township of Marshfield, the vote was 12 (5%) for and 219 (95%) against.⁶ Evidently such farming communities did not want to spend the money or did not see need to use their taxes to support a monument that was to be located within the city of Fond du Lac. In any event, their voices were in the minority.

Fiscal approval accomplished, the next step was to decide on the specific design and to award a contract to a company to build the monument. The monument committee solicited bids from three different companies, although County records only contain the name of the company that received the commission to construct the monument. No information remains describing the criteria used to select that successful bidder. The only surviving description of the other two companies that submitted bids for the project is that one, like the successful bidder, was a company from the East Coast, while the other firm was a company located near Kenosha, Wisconsin. The Bronze Monumental Company of Bridgeport, Connecticut was the successful bidder for the contract.⁷

The Bronze Monumental Company no longer exists. It was one of many such foundries of this type, located in a city already known for its metal manufacturing. Of the many Civil War monuments made and erected from the late 1860s to the early 1900s, most were fabricated by a relatively small number of firms. This further reinforced the basic similarity of the monuments with respect to figurative sculpture, type and iconography.

Having chosen the manufacturer and the design, the last step for the Monument Committee was to pick an appropriate place to locate the monument. Apparently this was not a difficult decision; it was decided to place the statue in the Courthouse Square.⁸ This was a logical place because Mark Harrison's bequest had specified that location, the park was a popular gathering place, and it was the political center of both the city and the county. Locating

⁶ "Honor The Soldier," *The Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, September 25, 1902.

⁷ "For The Soldiers," *The Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, June 16, 1902.

⁸ *Ibid.*

the statue on the Square ensured that the public would see how its money had been spent. Most other cities that erected similar monuments at this time also placed their statues in such a central location.

This was a time of civic improvement in general for Fond du Lac. In addition to completing the clock tower, planning and fund raising were underway for a public library and a hotel. The Main Street paving project was beginning. Other building projects in town included an opera house in which plays and other entertainments would be performed. Prosperous businessmen and leading citizens were constructing many of the city's handsome Queen Anne homes. By 1903, the library was completed, and Main Street was paved with bricks. The people of the City and County of Fond du Lac, a prosperous and thriving place, were displaying the trappings of their new wealth and surrounding themselves with the amenities of late Victorian society through the completion of these public and private projects.

The newly completed bronze monument, together with its stone base, arrived in the city of Fond du Lac on September 25, 1902. Its arrival, however, lacked a certain grandeur. In fact, the monument arrived by train encased in a large number of crates. The exact number of these containers was in some dispute, and the best estimate is perhaps seventeen. The *Daily Reporter* on that day reported that it would take at least a week to put the monument together, prepare the site by laying a sidewalk, and erect a fence to keep vandals from harming the monument. In retrospect, this seems very rapid, and perhaps it was too quick. The entire monument eventually developed a tilt through subsidence of the soil beneath its base. Perhaps a more careful preparation of the ground would have prevented this problem.

The *Reporter* also said that an official unveiling would most likely take place about November 1, 1902. Surprisingly, there is no record that this unveiling or dedication ever took place. Why did the city and county governments not have an official dedication or presentation ceremony? While there was no explanation recorded at the time, it seems likely that, once the County Executive Board and members of the G.A.R. previewed the monument, they did not like what they saw. There is no question that they were disappointed. Being so disappointed, they may have decided to postpone any celebration or not to have a formal unveiling at all.

Disappointment almost inevitably leads to a search to assign blame, and in this case the criticism of the new monument soon produced allegations of malfeasance. In light of these charges, the County Executive Board decided to conduct a public investigation of the monument

committee. This investigation began in November 1902, as the Union Soldiers Monument Committee made their final report. H. P. Thompson, adjutant of the G.A.R. chapter, raised allegations on behalf of its commander, William De Steese, that the monument was not made of the high quality materials that originally had been specified. There were also some implications that committee members pocketed money, because the original estimate of the cost of the monument had been for \$6,000, while the final payment made to the Bronze Monumental Company was only \$5,423.54.⁹ What does seem clear, in light of the financial transaction, is that the veterans organizations who had promoted the project had provided little if any of the money actually used for purchase of the monument. The sum that was made available included Mark Harrison's bequest of \$500, and the referendum to authorize use of County funds had stipulated that \$5,000 of public money might be employed. Those two amounts, added together, more than accounted for the total sum remitted in payment for the statue. The enthusiasm of the veterans for such a monument evidently had not extended to include use of their own money for the project. While hypothetical funds that may or may not have been donated by the G.A.R. itself were perhaps not in question in their complaint, there was a strong concern that the people of Fond du Lac County had not received what they had expected and had been led to believe they were purchasing. And of course there was a discrepancy between the publicly described cost of the monument, \$6,000, and the sum of \$5,423.54 that was actually paid.

During the November meeting of the County Executive Board, a committee was appointed by Board Chairman Maurice McKenna to investigate the matter. This committee consisted of five board members and the City Attorney. The board members were P. W. Gallagher, J. W. Hall, C. W. Keys, Edward Murray, and Joseph Perrizo. The City Attorney was a lawyer named Joseph M. Gooding, Esq. Gooding had been born in Indiana in 1867, the son of a Union Army veteran. Educated in Ohio, he subsequently read law in St. Paul, Minnesota. In 1893, he came to Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, where he opened a law practice. From 1901 to 1903 he took on the duties of City Attorney, and it was in this capacity that he became involved in the investigation of the Union Soldiers Monument Committee.¹⁰

The members of the Investigation Committee were instructed to report back to the Executive Board with their findings at the January 1903 County Executive Board meeting. Their

⁹ "To Honor the Dead," *The Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, September 25, 1902.

¹⁰ Maurice McKenna, *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin, Past and Present*, v. II (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912).

report determined that the monument in fact had been made from materials other than those originally discussed. During the interim period between initial discussions and fulfillment of the Fond du Lac order, it appeared that the Bridgeport Monumental Company had been experimenting with new metals for casting its monuments. The firm asserted that these newer materials would resist the effects of weather and time better than the metal alloy that had been discussed with the committee. The Investigation Committee concluded that the Bridgeport Company should have informed the Monument Committee of this change, thus giving the Committee the opportunity to approve the substitution of the new materials.¹¹

Between November and January, the Investigation Committee interviewed various parties involved with the monument's acquisition, including the firms that initially had been contacted by the Union Soldiers Monument Committee. As a result of these interviews, a claim was made by one of the unsuccessful bidders that the selection process had been flawed. In his interview with the Investigation Committee, the owner of the Wisconsin firm who submitted an estimate alleged that his bid had not been taken seriously.¹²

On January 8, 1903 the Investigation Committee made its report to the Executive Board of Fond du Lac County. The report, which was printed in the *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter* on January 11, 1903, stated that the Soldiers Monument Committee had not intentionally done anything wrong. It was acknowledged that, in gathering estimates and designs, the members of the monument committee had not possessed the expertise to do the job requested of them. In the view of the Investigation Committee, this did not represent an effort to defraud the County. As for the discrepancy between the price of the monument and the sum paid for it, the Bronze Monumental Company explained that they had reduced the final price of the monument to the amount of money that had been raised for the project. Therefore, the Investigation Committee absolved the members of the Union Soldiers Monument Committee of any wrongdoing. With the submission of their report finding that there had been no malfeasance, both committees were disbanded.

The men who had served on the now-disbanded Union Soldiers Monument Committee, Peter McGalloway, M. M. Finnegan, and John Miles, all completed their one-year terms on the County Executive Board. Peter McGalloway, who had chaired the committee, had served his

¹¹ Executive Board Minutes, November 1902, Fond du Lac County Courthouse.

¹² Executive Board Minutes, January 1903, Fond du Lac County Courthouse.

first term on the County Executive Board in 1894, and he served on that body again from 1899 to 1903. After the completion of the statue and the controversy surrounding it, there is no record of him serving on the Executive Board again. It is impossible to say whether the termination of his service to the County resulted from the scandal that surrounded him or if it came as a consequence of McGalloway's own reaction to the way in which his committee had been treated. M. M. Finnegan served on the Executive Board in 1896-1897, 1900-1902, and one final term in 1905. The third man on the committee, John Miles, served on the Board from 1899 to 1904. These individuals then faded from public view and entered Fond du Lac history as footnotes to a scandal long forgotten by most of the community. The same can be said of the men who made up the Investigation Committee. They finished their County Executive Board terms and then they returned to their respective occupations full time.¹³ Still, resolution of the malfeasance accusations did not satisfy completely the feelings of resentment and dissatisfaction harbored by members of the G.A.R. They informally christened the monument the "Tin Soldier," and the derisive name stuck for many years.

In addition to rejecting the "Tin Soldier," the G.A.R. commissioned another Union Soldier Veterans Monument and erected it in Rienzi Cemetery in 1907. Again, the G.A.R. W.R.C., U.V.L., along with Spanish American Veterans, were asked to help raise funds for this new monument. Sculpted entirely from stone, the new statue was viewed as more "modern" and less ornate in its decoration than had been the previously erected monument, which now stood, unloved, on the Courthouse Square. Ironically, probably due to the gray color of the stone from which it is carved, many people in Fond du Lac now refer to the Rienzi statue as the "Confederate Soldier" monument, and there are even those who mistakenly believe that it marks the location of graves of soldiers who fought for the Confederacy.

The G.A.R. complaint notwithstanding, the original Union Solders Monument remains an impressive sight and hardly deserves its nickname, "Tin Soldier." It is an imposing memorial, typical of the civic creations of its age, and it repays careful examination.

The color of the monument is blue-gray. The statue, on its elaborate pedestal, stands approximately thirty feet high and is about ten feet square at the base. The base was carved to represent rough-hewn stone. Each of the four sides of the base features a major battle of the

¹³ Maurice McKenna, v. II.

Civil War: Gettysburg (July 1-3, 1863), Atlanta (July 22, 1864), Vicksburg (surrendered July 4, 1863), and Shiloh (April 6-7, 1862). Men from Fond du Lac County fought in each of those battles, and many of them lost their lives. There is no record that these specific battles were requested by the Monument Committee, for no correspondence between the Committee and the Bridgeport Monumental Company survives. Yet it would not be surprising if this selection had been made to emphasize the contribution to the Union victory made by soldiers from Fond du Lac.

Of course, men from Fond du Lac fought in many other Civil War engagements, but these battles also were all among the most important Union victories of the conflict. At the Battle of Gettysburg, six Wisconsin infantry regiments had participated, and this battle was usually seen as the turning point of the War in the East. The Wisconsin contingent in the Siege of Vicksburg had been 12 infantry regiments, one cavalry unit, and three artillery batteries. Vicksburg's fall, after a prolonged campaign to invest the city and a short but difficult siege, had cut the Confederacy in half and opened the Mississippi to Union shipping throughout its length. The Battle of Atlanta, the culmination of a series of actions around the city, engaged 14 infantry regiments, one cavalry unit, and two artillery batteries from Wisconsin. Success there had ensured Lincoln's reelection and the North's willingness to prosecute the war to victory. At Shiloh, three Wisconsin infantry regiments had fought in a battle that was a rare early victory for the Union, memorable also for its very heavy casualties. The Battle of Shiloh, incidentally, was a late addition to the monument, specifically requested to cover up the names of the members of the Monument Committee that originally had been carved into the stone base. It may be that this was done because the Committee itself had a change of heart and decided that they should not be immortalized on the monument, but perhaps they were moved to take this action due to some criticism, (records of which have not survived), at what others might have seen as hubris for including their own names on the pedestal in the first place.

As one's eyes move upward from the enumeration of battles, the upper part of the monument pedestal resembles a church spire, standing tall and proud. On the bottom of the spire is the dedication, which states "1861-5 Dedicated to the memory of The Brave Men of Fond du Lac County Wis. Who Saved the Union, Fought Victoriously on land and sea, in the great struggle of the Civil War. 1861-1865." The text provides a good example of the patriotic rhetoric that was part of all such dedications in the early twentieth century.

On the north side of the pedestal, at the same level as the dedication, is the U.V.L. emblem, a shield with stars lining the outer edge. In the center are the letters U.V.L. with 1861 and 1865 in the pediment. On the west side is a replica of the G.A.R. medallion. At the top of the medallion is an eagle, with its wings extended. In the claws of the eagle are crossed cannons. Holding up these cannons are nine cannon balls, stacked in a diamond shape. An American Flag makes up the ribbon from which the medallion is suspended. A star comprises the bottom part of the medallion. In the center of the star, a sailor and a soldier clasp hands in fraternal greeting with a family group. Circling that icon are the words "Grand Army of the Republic 1861-1865." In each of the five points of the star are different symbols representing branches of the military.

Continuing around to the south side of the monument, the symbol is that of the W.R.C., again a replica of a medal. On the top of the ribbon bar is an image that resembles a wrought iron railing. A bar connects the medallion to the ribbon. In the center are initials, but the exact letters are indecipherable. At the end of the ribbon is the cross-shaped medallion. On the edge of each cross are the words "Women's Relief Corps, 1883." The center of the cross, circled by stars, depicts, once again, a scene of military fraternity.

Greek-inspired pilasters and a pointed temple gable frame each side of the monument, representing elements from the common neoclassic style of the day. These neoclassical decorations seemed a fitting image to incorporate in a monument of this style, and they are echoed in public buildings and cemetery architecture in both Europe and the United States at the time, but it was a style that was also rapidly going out of fashion.

Within the Greek pediment-style roof peaks are the dates 1861-5. Also at this level are two funerary urns on the north and south faces. Each of these urns is draped in a stone representation of cloth bunting with a wreath of flowers.

Halfway up the "spire" portion of the pedestal are military emblems. The emblem for the navy adorns the west side, an anchor tied to a capstan. Behind this emblem are crossed oars. Encircling each of these icons is a wreath of oak and laurel leaves. The cavalry emblem on the south face is composed of crossed swords with the points toward the ground, surrounded by a wreath. The east side is decorated with the symbol for infantry, crossed rifles, with a wreath surrounding them. The final symbol, on the north side, represents the artillery, crossed ramrods propped up by ten cannon balls and surrounded by a wreath.

Continuing up the shaft, the decorations take on a more dramatically florid appearance, with sculpted draped flags meeting at a wreath. Bordering the shaft to make the plinth is a row of rose buds. Above this decorative border are fancy carvings of a shell motif and roped lotus leaves. Then follow the roof peaks and yet another row of rose buds. At the top is an impressive-looking Union soldier, larger than life-size. He currently faces westward. When the monument was first erected he faced the east, away from the Courthouse that stood on the square. The Union soldier wears a typical military uniform of the period, with a forage cap on top of his head. His facial expression is sorrowful and stern, with a furrowed brow. His eyes look straight ahead toward the horizon. He also has a full mustache. In the style of the Civil War era, the mustache extends to the jaw line. There is a dimple in the center of his squared chin. In front of him he holds out his rifle with the butt resting at his feet and his hands grasping the barrel near the muzzle. At his left hip is a bayonet in its scabbard. His coat is knee-length, standard Union issue. His feet are slightly parted with the left leg in front of the right.

In summary, the statue is a grand example of late nineteenth-century decorative art, a style that was then ceasing to be fashionable, and probably the elaborate decoration of the grandiose pedestal and its sheer monumentality no longer appealed to many who viewed it at the time. Certainly the much simpler design of the statue erected five years later in Rienzi Cemetery suggests that design issues were at least partly behind the criticism that G.A.R. members had made of Fond du Lac's first Civil War monumental statue.

When Fond du Lac County tore down the Old Courthouse in the 1960s, it was noticed that the monument had begun to tilt and was in need of some repair, but it was not until the early 1980s that serious consideration of renovating the monument was made. One reason the Executive Board did not do anything with the monument in the 1960s was because they decided that repair of the monument could be put off, for it was in no immediate danger of falling. The cost of making what were presumed to be the needed repairs appears to have been the primary consideration behind the decision to delay work on the monument.

Early in 1980, the Union Soldiers Monument came again to public attention. The statue had deteriorated further, with the soldier atop his pedestal exhibiting an increasingly pronounced tilt, and the County Executive Board decided that it was time to restore this prominent public landmark. In 1981, the Board started to make plans to repair the memorial. Unlike the original project, which had been completed within a period of a few months, the planning and execution

of the repair project on the statue took place over a period of half a decade. Perhaps taking a cue from the mishap of the original Monument Committee, the Board took construction bids from several different construction companies in the area. The company with the winning bid was the Searl Construction Company.¹⁴

Searl Company workmen began repairs on the monument in 1986. It took months to complete the job, during which time engineers strengthened the internal support structure of the pedestal column by adding another frame to that which was already present. While this reinforcement was being done, the soldier was removed from the pedestal and placed in the lobby of the Courthouse for display.¹⁵

As workers repaired the structure, they found something had gone amiss in the core of the pedestal. A bolt that had been part of the system by which the statue was affixed to its plinth had broken. It is not known when the bolt became broken. It may have been on initial construction, or it may have failed at some later time, but it was fairly evident that this broken bolt was a major reason for the statue's tilt out of alignment. A reason for the tilt of the entire monument was the uneven settling of the monument pedestal, over time, into the soft ground on which it stood, gradually giving a "Leaning Tower" appearance to the whole construction. In order to restore the statue to its original plumb, Searl Construction had to jack up part of the monument and reinforce the ground under the pedestal. This work largely removed the pedestal's tilt, although not completely. Therefore, when the soldier was replaced, he was tilted slightly back on his heels in order to achieve vertical orientation.¹⁶

In the years since the 1986 repair of the monument, the repairs seem to be surviving well, and there is no visual evidence of continuing soil subsidence. As mentioned earlier, the soldier on the monument initially faced eastward, but his orientation on the plinth was reversed during the repairs so that he no longer faced directly into the row of large trees that had grown up along Main Street since the beginning of the century. And the "about face" was also possible, of course, because the old Courthouse was gone, there was no longer any need for the soldier to face outward from it, and a much better view of the whole construction was available from the park that extended to the west.

¹⁴ Harley Buchholz, "Funds Sought to Refurbish War Memorial," *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, January 6, 1983.

¹⁵ Steve Sandberg, "Statue taken for Repairs," *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, March 6, 1987.

¹⁶ Construction Notes, Searl Construction Company, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

There is yet another chapter to this story of Fond du Lac's statuary war memorials. A third soldier monument was erected in the city in the spring of 1936. The "Traveler" or "Hiker," as it was called locally, was erected to pay tribute to the men of the Spanish-American War of 1898. Like the Union Soldier Monument, this statue was one of many virtually identical, mass-produced monuments erected in different places around the country. Unlike the fate of Fond du Lac's two Civil War monuments, however, an elaborate dedication ceremony was staged in this case. The dedication took place on Memorial Day, 1936. Many Fond du Lac residents watched a parade and listened to speeches. The speakers stressed the notion that this monument was erected to honor those who had fought, not to glorify war itself, a popular sentiment during the depression and in the wake of World War I.¹⁷

But the "Traveler" did share something in common with the other two war monuments. As with the others, this monument was erected about four decades (in this case 38 years) after the events it commemorated. So it seems the people of Fond du Lac had begun to develop a custom of reflecting for a time on events before paying tribute to their war heroes, though this custom did not persist in the case of the city's much more modest plaques commemorating participation of its citizens in the two World Wars. Perhaps it was simply that the generation that had fought in a war needed to come to political and economic prominence in the community before its military exploits were celebrated in statuary.

The differences among the Spanish-American War Monument and its Civil War brethren were greater than the similarities. The Civil War statues had been erected in periods of national prosperity, whereas the "Traveler" was constructed during the period of the Great Depression. Like the Rienzi monument but unlike the statue on the Courthouse Square, it was entirely privately financed, and both of the later monuments were much less expensive than the more elaborate original Union Soldiers Monument. Situated at the northern end of Main Street, the "Traveler" immediately became a site for civic celebrations, beginning with the dedication ceremony itself, which seemed to many a pleasant holiday rather than a solemn memorial occasion. Many of the people who attended the dedication probably felt it was an inexpensive and relaxing family event. Most families brought picnic lunches to enjoy. Of course the Spanish American War had had much less impact on Fond du Lac and its citizens than had the Civil War. But it

¹⁷ "The Hiker Bronze Tribute To Men of 1898, Dedicated At Public Rites Held At Park," *Commonwealth Reporter*, June 1, 1936.

was the “Traveler” that became the location of choice for civic celebration. Two years later, citizens of the city held another memorial service at the monument, which became a common site for public speeches. Fond du Lac’s “Hiker” was much admired locally as a piece of public art, and it was situated near Fond du Lac’s favorite Lakeside Park. Perhaps most importantly, it was fitted with a speaker’s rostrum below the pedestal that made this monument more suitable for public declamations and oratory during civic festivals. And, one might add, it was not tainted by a history of civic dissent, disappointment, and scandal.

Monuments come in many different forms and communicate a variety of messages. This is evident in the assortment of public memorials that exist in even so small a community as Fond du Lac. In this city, each of the three major military monuments looks quite different from the others, reflecting the style and iconography of its period. Each also has a special story, unique to the community. To study them is to read a chapter in the book of the community's past, with plot, place in time, and cast of characters. Sometimes, if one looks deeply enough, one may even find a scandal like the one concerning the Union Soldiers Monument.

Perhaps some day there may be another chapter to add to the story of the Union Soldiers Monument. One might even imagine that the day may come when someone influential in the community undertakes a new public history lesson, and then perhaps the community will decide that it is at last time to offer a proper dedication ceremony for this monument and time to lay to rest the last taint of scandal surrounding the monument. Perhaps some day Fond du Lac will at last give a proper welcome to its first war memorial, its much-maligned “Tin Soldier.”

Fond du Lac and the Election of 1920

Jason Ehlert

The national election of 1920 brought significant changes to the American electoral system. This was the first election in which women voted, and it also was the first election in which reporters broadcast the returns over the radio. The election also was a watershed in that its outcome repudiated Woodrow Wilson's progressivism and America's involvement in international affairs. Instead, the voters endorsed a Republican conservatism that was epitomized by Warren G. Harding's promise of a return to "normalcy."

As a repudiation of President Wilson's foreign policy, the election of 1920 reflected a distinct desire for change in national politics. Democratic Party control gave way to Republican rule. The campaign centered on two primary issues. The first was whether the United States should become a member of the League of Nations. The second consisted of a blend of urban postwar unemployment and lingering rural distress that Republicans termed "the farm and labor crisis." A secondary but important factor in this election was women's suffrage and the consequent very large number of first time voters.

Republicans campaigned on the need for change, a feeling that resonated not only in Washington but also in Wisconsin and in Fond du Lac. The impulse for political change in the United States seemed likely to produce a swing to the Republican Party.

The national Republican standard-bearer was Senator Warren G. Harding. Harding had entered the Republican National Convention as a dark horse and emerged as the Republican candidate for president. He had been involved in Ohio politics for years both as Lieutenant Governor and as U.S. Senator, but he had hardly been mentioned as a likely candidate for president. Only a week before the convention opened in June, Harding ran sixth in a poll of Republican candidates for the nomination. At the opening of the convention he had only thirty-nine voting delegates pledged to him.¹

The pre-convention favorite for the Republican nomination had been General Leonard C. Wood, who had served in World War I. His prospects faded after the results of an investigation into campaign spending were published. Senator William Squire Kenyon of Iowa led the investigation and found that Wood had spent a whopping \$1,773,303. Illinois Governor Frank

¹ Francis Russell, *The Shadow of Blooming Grove* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1968), 355.

Orren Lowden had spent \$414, 984, whereas Harding had spent just \$113,109. Wood and Lowden both had their campaigns tarnished by the Kenyon investigation, and this contributed to Harding's victory at the Convention.²

The Convention opened on June 8. In the early ballots for the presidential nomination, Wood led, while Harding was not doing well at all. Harding apparently became depressed and almost withdrew from the process, but Harry M. Daugherty, a lawyer and politician from Ohio and later U.S. Attorney General under Harding, encouraged Harding to stay in the race. Daugherty hoped for a deadlock between Wood and Lowden, and this eventually happened. When the convention stalled, the leadership, most of whom were either members of the Senate or the House of Representatives, met in the famous "smoke-filled room" in the Blackstone Hotel in Chicago, where a debate on who should be the party's candidate continued until the early hours of the morning of June 9.³ Neither Wood nor Lowden could gather enough delegate support to regain momentum, and it was decided that a third candidate was needed. Warren G. Harding became that third candidate, a true dark horse. Harding gradually took delegates away from Wood, and on the tenth ballot, Harding was selected as the Republican nominee for president.⁴

The campaign was enormously influenced by what most Americans perceived as a foreign policy aberration, the nation's participation in World War I, just the sort of foreign entanglement that George Washington had warned about in his Farewell Address. The reaction was an isolationist impulse that made the issue of membership in the League of Nations the most significant debating point of the election. Dr. D. O. Kinsman, a professor from Lawrence College in Appleton, explained the League issue to Fond du Lac voters.⁵ Kinsman claimed that League membership might be one of the most important questions the United States would ever have to answer. The League of Nations, according to Kinsman, was an "historical product." "The purpose in organizing the League was two-fold: to preserve the peace of the world and to promote the general welfare of mankind."⁶ Additionally, the League was to ensure the independence of all its member nations. The League Covenant also became an integral part of the Treaty of Versailles in fixing the conditions of peace with Germany.

² Russell, 352.

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ *Ibid.*, 380-381.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Daily Commonwealth*, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, October 30, 1920, 1.

Harding did not support the League of Nations, although he did favor participation in some kind of world governing body such as the World Court at The Hague. Harding and many other Republicans particularly disagreed with Article X of the League of Nations Covenant. Harding and the Republicans interpreted Article X as allowing the United States to mobilize troops to solve world conflicts without the consent of Congress. This was a dubious interpretation by the Republicans, as Article X simply provided for the independence of all the League member nations. If any member's independence were attacked or challenged, its independence was to be protected by other League member nations. But Article X said nothing about anyone mobilizing troops to solve world conflicts or mechanisms that might be required to accomplish this. Nevertheless, it made a convenient inflammatory issue for a nation with recent memory of World War I battlefield losses and demands upon the civilian population.

James Middleton Cox, Governor of Ohio, former Congressman, and the Democratic candidate for President, supported the League of Nations, a position reflected in the Democratic platform. The Democrats claimed that the League of Nations was the only way to put war in the past and to prevent future wars from happening.⁷

An important factor in the election so far as Wisconsin was concerned was the State's maverick Senator, Robert La Follette. La Follette, a Republican, was Wisconsin's senior U.S. Senator and he strongly opposed the League of Nations. La Follette earlier had opposed United States involvement in World War I. He claimed that World War I was merely a war to protect big corporations' interests overseas and argued that the majority of the country did not want to go to war in Europe. The idealistic and populist Senator asserted that the decision to go to war had been decided, not by a majority of the people, but rather by a select few. La Follette felt that the soldiers lying in a trench in Europe should decide if they wanted the war, not just a few people in Washington. La Follette saw big business getting richer because of the war and argued that conscription was also controlled by and benefited big business.

La Follette had supported President Wilson's neutrality policy for the United States that had been adopted in 1914 and emphasized in Wilson's 1916 campaign for reelection. When the United States went to war in April 1917, La Follette and Wilson became bitter enemies. La Follette and other members of the Wisconsin delegation of the House of Representatives had been some of the few in Congress who had voted against a declaration of war on Germany. La

⁷*Ibid.*

Follette filibustered the declaration of war so much that they almost had to remove him from the Senate chambers forcefully. Following the logic of his economic analysis, La Follette asserted that if the war meant a way out of depression and economic difficulty, then he would rather that the country remain in depression.⁸

La Follette's message seemed likely to play well in Wisconsin, a state dominated by citizens with a strong German heritage. Descendants of German immigrants to Wisconsin did not like fighting a war against their relatives in Europe. In local referenda on the eve of the American declaration of war, people in Sheboygan County voted 6,133 against the war and only 17 for it, while in Monroe County 954 voted against participation and only 95 in favor.

American intervention in the Russian Civil War and domestic U.S. government repression of so-called radicals led La Follette to articulate strong opposition to the League of Nations. While La Follette supported international cooperation, he saw the League of Nations as a tool of dominant imperialist powers that would prevent the formation of democracies throughout the world after the war. In La Follette's view, the League was merely a mechanism for Woodrow Wilson and his allies to protect their financial interests against the Bolshevik Russia and other revolutionary and anti-colonial governments. La Follette's vision of a future world order, on the other hand, was one without armaments, without imperialism, without conscription, one in which the people voted by referendum before they went to war. "We do not need to restrain the peoples of different countries from making war upon each other. . . . We do need to restrain the ruling classes of every country from inciting or compelling its people to war upon those of some other country."

La Follette also objected to what he saw as President Wilson's domination of the Senate. La Follette worked to restore the Senate's prerogatives. People, he claimed, were tired of "[d]emocracy and rhetoric" and were more concerned with local issues like their local economies, their jobs, and their families. According to La Follette, Americans were patriotic and had fought World War I. But they were not then concerned about the League of Nations. They just wanted to get their lives back to normal. La Follette considered that Wilson's plans for peace

⁸ David P. Thelen, *Robert La Follette and the Insurgent Spirit* (Boston: 1976), 129-136.

would not accomplish this. As he said, “The little group of men at Versailles were not peacemakers but instead were war makers.”⁹

Wisconsin’s junior Senator, Republican Irving Lenroot, sided with Harding on the League of Nations issue. Lenroot shared none of La Follette’s populism. A more conservative Republican, he suggested that some international group of nations might be necessary, but he felt that the League of Nations, as it had been established, challenged American freedom and democracy.¹⁰ Lenroot was accused by some, including Democratic Senator James Reed of Missouri, who spoke in Fond du Lac, of not taking a firm stand on the issue.¹¹ Lenroot’s criticism of the League focused on the specious issue of Article X and the alleged requirement that U.S. troops be mobilized to help settle world affairs without the consent of Congress. So Reed’s criticism had some justification.¹²

While foreign policy dominated campaign rhetoric, domestic concerns also played a role in the election. The United States had experienced an economic slump after the end of the World War. The “farm and labor situation,” as it was described, was not good at the time of the election of 1920. Not that the two factions were united. For example, farmers resented gains by urban labor from the 1919 adoption of a new minimum wage law requiring that 22 cents per hour be paid to women and minors. This law went into effect on August 1 of that year and was seen by farmers as likely to increase their costs.

Contemporary newspapers in Fond du Lac provide descriptions of some significant economic issues that engaged the local public. Fond du Lac had become an industrial center and also a center of union activity prior to World War I, but the war accelerated both of these developments. Fond du Lac business was growing, so the postwar depression seemed to be ending, at least for some. The annual payroll at the Rueping Leather Company, one of Fond du Lac’s largest employers, had increased to more than \$1,200,000, and 1,200 workers were employed there. Labor organizers were active, signaling perhaps an increasing militancy and also the return of better times. The trades and Labor Council occupied their new headquarters in the G.A.R. Hall. Workers in the city’s retail meat markets organized the Amalgamated Meat Cutters and Butcher Workmen of North America, Local 300. Rex Typewriter employees walked

⁹ Thelen, 130, 150-151.

¹⁰ *Daily Commonwealth*, October 29, 1920, 1.

¹¹ *Daily Commonwealth*, October 28, 1920, 1.

¹² *Daily Commonwealth*, October 29, 1920, 1.

out in sympathy with the resignation of one J. H. Love. Members of Locals in the building trades went out on strike against the building contractors. And the labor market experienced pressure caused by the return of war veterans. To try to meet the employment needs of demobilized soldiers, The Knights of Columbus set up a Labor Bureau in the Labor Hall to assist the returning veterans.¹³

Locally, the labor problems hit home hardest in North Fond du Lac, where the Chicago Northwestern Railroad shops were on strike as part of a national railroad strike in 1919-1920. Two-hundred shop workers, seeking an 85-cent raise, started their strike by walking off their jobs. In the local area, over 1,000 railroad workers left their jobs in support of the first 200 who had triggered the strike in North Fond du Lac.¹⁴ “The movement of democracy in industry,” La Follette explained in 1919, “is tending to supersede at many points the old struggle for political democracy.”¹⁵

The farmer’s plight also remained a serious one. The scissors crisis between low prices for agricultural products and high costs for goods needed on the farm produced increasing frustration among farmers. A Republican commentator, U.S. Senator Edwin Fremont Ladd of North Dakota, noted that farmers had been very individualistic and previously could deal with organized business, but this was no longer the case. Farmers had to find a way to reduce the role of the middleman and also get the cost of living down. In 1919, a Farm–Labor Cooperative Association was founded in Kenosha with the aim to do just that: reduce the high cost of living and get rid of the middleman.¹⁶ Farmers were less likely to organize than urban labor, according to Senator Robert La Follette, who knew a great deal about farms. La Follette, who boasted having grown up on a family farm and having helped to run it, became a spokesman for both farmers and laborers.

According to La Follette, “The militance of labor was paralleled by a growing discontent among farmers.” The collapse of farm markets, the lifting of wartime regulations over the food industry, the end of guaranteed farm prices, and the Federal Reserve Board’s deflationary policy all combined to produce a depression in agriculture. This downturn further isolated farmers from urban prosperity. Wheat farmers were upset that they received only about a quarter of the price

¹³ Harold Richter, *The Labor Movement in Fond du Lac* (Privately Printed, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1952).

¹⁴ Richter (no pagination).

¹⁵ Thelen, 161.

¹⁶ Thelen, 162.

that consumers paid for bread, at the time around ten cents per loaf. Farmers clearly had to find new and better ways to get a larger share of the profits from their products. La Follette was dedicated to defeating large corporations and big business, and he clearly spoke for farmers and laborers at the 1920 Republican National Convention. His opinions were not widely shared at that gathering. Other delegates at the convention accused La Follette of being a “Bolshevi,” and when speeches nominating Harding began, the Wisconsin delegates stood up and booed. La Follette increasingly talked of forming a third party that was free from corporate control.¹⁷

Farm prices continued to decline, but farmers were not alone in their economic distress; for industrial workers, the postwar depression had also brought hard times, and there were few pay raises. Strikes in the mining industry and by railroad workers could become very bloody. Even policemen in Boston walked off the job, and there was widespread fear that much of the unrest was stimulated by “Bolshevik” agitators. In general, the postwar working environment was characterized by great labor unrest, public alarm, and “red-baiting.”

Despite economic conditions that seemed desperate to many, the 1920 elections would provide no real solution for the farmer-worker discontent. They wanted to be a larger part of the productive process and get more returns for their many hard hours of work.¹⁸ Neither political party seemed to address their issues effectively, and the political dialogue of the campaign evaded a frank discussion of their problems.

William Titus, a Republican State Senator from Fond du Lac County who was both a farmer and a businessman, worked hard in the State Senate for what he claimed were farmers’ interests. Titus drafted several bills intended to benefit farmers. He seemed to agree with U.S. Senator Irving Lenroot in his approach to help the farmer. Lenroot, in attacking La Follette, claimed that radicalism had crept into Wisconsin, and it was the farmer who stopped it. But Lenroot did not stop with “Red Scare” rhetoric. He argued that the best way to fight subversive threats was to help farmers with their problems. Lenroot advocated state help for farmers to secure better marketing facilities through establishment of producer cooperative associations built on business principles. Lenroot claimed that Republicans had made a covenant with the

¹⁷ Thelen, 161-3.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

farmers, and it was up to party leaders to see that it was kept. Optimism was high that the State Legislature would pass bills that would deal with some of the farmers' problems.¹⁹

Women's suffrage may have been one of the biggest factors in the election of 1920. Women had received the right to vote with the passage of the 19th Amendment to the United States Constitution in 1919 and its ratification in 1920. The United States thus became the 26th country in the world to give women the right to vote, joining the ranks of Canada, Russia, Mexico, and the Scandinavian countries, among others. Wisconsin's State Legislature ratified the amendment for women's suffrage on August 18, 1920, by a vote of 24 to 1 in the Senate and 54 to 2 in the House. A number of States, including Wisconsin, Minnesota, Indiana, Ohio, Iowa, and Tennessee, had given women suffrage prior to the election of 1920.²⁰ Many Southern States, such as Florida, Alabama, Georgia, and Mississippi, still had not ratified the amendment. Many of the Western States, such as Wyoming, Idaho, and Colorado, had given women the vote as early as 1869. Wisconsin, like many other Midwestern States, awarded women suffrage in 1920, just in time for the presidential election.

Senator Irving Lenroot supported women's suffrage, asserting that women would ensure cleaner politics. Lenroot also claimed that women had been studying the issues more deeply, would vote more responsibly, and would also appreciate the vote more. The Farm-Labor League formed under the direction of La Follette only had one concern with women voting, to encourage women to vote to help the "working man."²¹

Harding supported both national prohibition, the other great social issue of the day, and women's suffrage; yet when the Senate voted on women's suffrage, Harding was absent. Harding's half-hearted support for women's suffrage may have been a strategy to avoid offense to anyone and thus to gain more political power. It seems many of the things Harding did were done for that reason; he was very careful to avoid making anyone unhappy with him.

In Wisconsin, the Republican Party possessed a tremendous bundle of political energy in the person of Mrs. Theodora Youmans, an enthusiastic woman interested in politics, whose Democratic counterpart seems not to have existed. Theodora Youmans was married to businessman, newspaperman and politician Henry Mott Youmans. Her husband was printer and editor and eventual part-owner of the *Waukesha Freeman*. He also held many political offices in

¹⁹ *Daily Commonwealth*, January 11, 1921, 2.

²⁰ *Daily Commonwealth*, August 18, 1920, 1.

²¹ *Daily Commonwealth*, August 19, 1920, 3.

Waukesha. Mrs. Youmans had attended Carroll College in Waukesha and helped her husband edit the *Waukesha Freeman*.²²

The women's suffrage movement had been Theodora Youmans' principal concern, and she vigorously pushed for women's voting rights in Wisconsin. Her voice was a constant one in local newspapers during the 1920 campaign. In fact, Mrs. Youmans' dynamic political views and activities resulted in her selection as a delegate to the 1920 Republican National Convention.

The Wisconsin Republican State Committee urged women to join political parties because they claimed government was carried out through political parties. To join a political party, it was asserted, was the only way for women to achieve practical results with their ballots.²³ Theodora Youmans of the Republican State Committee echoed this message by supporting the Republican Party because that organization, she argued, had been the leading force to give women the right to vote in Wisconsin. Youmans stated that, since the Republican Party in Wisconsin enfranchised women, it showed itself to be "possessed with a sense of justice and a progressive spirit." Youmans claimed the Republican Party also should be the party of choice because its record, its strength, and its consistent support stood for a united nation. Theodora Youmans wrote that women should favor the Republican Party because the Republicans had given women the same standing as men, whereas the Democrats had not.²⁴ The message worked: the Republican Party appeared to offer more to women and seemed to care more; thus women supported the Republicans.

Of major interest to women generally, and to women in Fond du Lac in particular, was the need for improvement of the educational system. According to Youmans, the Republican Party was more proactive and had passed legislation addressing those needs, particularly industrial education.²⁵

The overall attitudes of voters seemed to blend a lingering regret by many for having entered the war, a widespread sense of dissatisfaction concerning the peace settlement, and a feeling of frustration with economic downturn and labor unrest after the war. After eight years of Democratic rule coincident to these events, a Republican victory in the election of 1920

²² *The Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography* (Madison: Wisconsin State Historical Society, 1960), 383-384.

²³ *Daily Commonwealth*, August 13, 1920, 1.

²⁴ *Daily Commonwealth*, August 14, 1920, 1.

²⁵ *Daily Commonwealth*, August 23, 1920, 1.

seemed a certainty. Thus, it was not surprising that the presidential election of 1920 was a huge victory for the Republicans in Fond du Lac County, in Wisconsin, and in the nation as a whole.

Wisconsin and Fond du Lac County overwhelmingly voted for Warren G. Harding. The presidential election results in the County were 12,543 votes for Harding, 3,400 votes for Cox, 695 votes for the Socialist Party Candidate, Eugene V. Debs, and 172 votes for Aaron Sherman Watkins of Ohio, the Prohibition Party candidate. Rural areas in Fond du Lac County, including Alto, Ashford, Oakfield, Eden, Byron, Rosendale, and Waupun, all went Republican, just as the pre-election polls had suggested would happen.²⁶ In Byron, there were 198 votes for Harding and 82 votes for Cox. In Rosendale, there were 187 votes for Harding and only 14 votes for Cox, while in the Village of Waupun, there were 89 votes for Harding and only 37 for Cox.

Urban areas varied little from the rural pattern. The Village of North Fond du Lac gave Harding a majority of its votes, casting 476 votes for Harding, 212 votes for Cox, and a surprising total of 73 votes for the Socialist Party candidate, the largest vote total Debs received in any Fond du Lac County village. Doubtless this was due to the impact of labor unrest among the many railroad workers who lived there. Voters in the city of Fond du Lac cast 4,803 votes for Harding to only 1,871 votes for Cox, with 439 votes going to Eugene V. Debs. Most of the votes for Debs came from industrial sections of Fond du Lac located in wards 5, 6, and 7. The area in Fond du Lac around First Street and Ninth Street seemed to give Democrat James Cox many of his votes in Fond du Lac. The landslide victory went to Harding.

The city of Ripon also gave Harding an overwhelming majority, awarding the Republican candidate 1,177 votes, Democrat Cox 188 votes, and Socialist Debs only 21 votes. The city of Waupun gave Harding 395 votes, Cox 107, and Debs only five.

Fond du Lac County truly overwhelmingly favored the Republicans and Harding. Eugene V. Debs, the Socialist Party candidate, received a surprisingly large amount of support in the city of Fond du Lac, an urban area with industrial laborers, but he did much less well in the rural communities like Byron, Alto, Ashford, and Rosendale. The one-issue Prohibition Party did not do well anywhere in Fond du Lac County, picking up just a few votes here and there. In summary, the Republicans received a huge majority of the votes in every village and city in Fond du Lac County. Results in other parts of Wisconsin and in the entire country mirrored this result.

²⁶ *The Wisconsin Blue Book* (Madison: Wisconsin State Printing Board, 1921), 619-620.

In the Electoral College Warren G. Harding received 404 votes and carried thirty-seven of forty-eight states, including Wisconsin.

The 1920 presidential election was not the only contest that the Republicans dominated in Wisconsin and Fond du Lac. State and county offices also went overwhelmingly to the Republicans. Wisconsin elected a Republican governor, James Blaine, over Democrat Robert B. McCoy, Prohibition Party candidate Henry Tubbs, and Socialist Party candidate William Coleman. The election for U.S. Senator from Wisconsin was also won by the Republicans, as incumbent Irving Lenroot defeated former Minister to China Paul S. Reinsch, the Democrat. The lieutenant gubernatorial election also went to the Republican candidate, George F. Comings, who defeated Socialist Henry Kleist.

Fond du Lac County local elections also favored Republicans, starting with the State Senate 18th District, where William Titus, the Republican candidate, defeated William Tomerly, the Socialist Party candidate, 12,214 votes to 731. There was no Democratic candidate for the 18th District. The race for Assembly First District went to Republican candidate J. J. Lamb, 6,165 votes to 2,572 votes for his Democratic opponent, Spencer Palmer. The Second District also went to a Republican, John E. Johnson, who received 5,131 votes to only three for his opponent.

The contest for District Attorney was taken by Republican James Murray, running unopposed, who received 12,804 votes. The Register of Deeds was won by the Republicans. J. G. Brunkhorst received 12,941 votes to only 483 for the Socialist candidate, Herman Prehn. There was no Democratic competition for Register of Deeds.²⁷ The absence of Democratic candidates for several races reflects the traditional strength of Republicans in Fond du Lac County.

According to national exit polls, many recent immigrant groups who might traditionally have voted Democratic had voted in favor of Harding. German immigrants supported Harding because they were upset at Woodrow Wilson over the decision to enter World War I. Swedish immigrants backed Harding for similar reasons. Irish-Americans voted for Harding because they were upset at Wilson for not supporting full Irish independence. European peasant immigrants also swung to Harding's side because they believed he would permit them to return to the more simple way of life that they had experienced in Europe. Age cohorts were also significant in

²⁷ *Daily Commonwealth*, November 1, 1920, 1.

Harding's victory. Middle-aged and elderly voters supported Harding because they wanted to return to the peace and quiet they thought had existed before the war and which they believed Harding would give them.²⁸

In summary, Warren G. Harding won the election in a landslide, taking 16,152,200 votes, or 61 per cent of the vote nationally. It was truly an overwhelming victory by the Republican Party's slate of candidates. Postwar frustration, isolationism, rural malaise, industrial strife, and a newly expanded electorate all helped to reinforce a reaction against eight years of Democratic incumbency in the White House. Both Fond du Lac and the State of Wisconsin reflected these national trends.

²⁸ *Daily Commonwealth*, November 1, 1920, 1; Andrew Sinclair, *The Available Man* (New York: MacMillan, 1965), 163.

Fond du Lac's Forgotten Famous Son: F. Ryan Duffy

Edie Birschbach

A climb up Bascom Hill on the University of Wisconsin campus rewards the effort with a magnificent view of the State Capitol and the City of Madison. Bascom Hall, built in 1860 atop the hill, houses the Chancellor and Dean of Students offices today.¹ Former students may recall the tradition of sledding down Bascom Hill on a cafeteria tray, while others may remember the bronze plaque bolted to the left side of the main entrance of Bascom Hall. A few may know the history and meaning of those engraved words, penned over a hundred years ago. Probably long forgotten is the role that was played by a young Fond du Lac man, Francis Ryan Duffy, of the Class of 1910, in an event that helped to shape the University of Wisconsin's image.

Duffy made his mark at the University of Wisconsin when, as senior class president, he and the senior class memorial committee became involved in a controversy with the Board of Regents concerning where and when the bronze plaque should be displayed.² It was tradition for each graduating class to leave a memorial to the University. As class president, Duffy appointed the committee that decided on the bronze plaque as a gift. It was presented to Professor William A. Scott on June 20, 1910, at the class day program.³ However, the Regents refused to accept it, stating "The university grounds and buildings should not be defaced by having memorials placed on them." The plaque, a 2.5 x 3 foot bronze tablet, was engraved with words about academic freedom taken from a Board of Regents report in 1894, following a hearing concerning economist Richard T. Ely.⁴

Now a hallowed and revered sentiment, the issue addressed on the plaque was at that time controversial. In an 1894 letter to the editor of the *Nation*, Regent Oliver E. Wells, "antagonist and violent public accuser of Professor Richard T. Ely," had accused Ely of promoting labor unrest and "socialist propaganda" in his writings.⁵ This created an embarrassing situation for the

¹ Merle Curti and Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1848-1925*, v. I (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1949), 141.

² Francis R. Duffy, Class President, *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, (undated), "Francis Ryan Duffy, son of Attorney F. F. Duffy of this city, has been elected president of the senior class of the University of Wisconsin, the first time that such an honor has been awarded to a Fond du Lac Student." *Cardinal*. F. R. Duffy '10, President letter to Editor Cardinal, undated. F. Ryan Duffy Papers, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, Scrapbook v. I.

³ "President Duffy Tells of Memorial," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, [Undated, approximately June 1910].

⁴ Theodore Herfurth, "Sifting and Winnowing: A Chapter in the History of Academic Freedom at the University of Wisconsin," in W. Lee Hansen, ed., *Academic Freedom on Trial* (Office of University Publications, University of Wisconsin, 1998), 63.

⁵ *The Nation*, 59 (July 12, 1894), 27.

University, and the Regents appointed a committee to investigate the charges.⁶ The hearing, which began on August 10, 1894, and culminated with the committee's report on September 18, 1894, completely exonerated Ely. The report also included an academic freedom statement.⁷ The Regents stated that in some settings Ely might be considered “visionary.” Their report continued,

[if] no professor should teach anything which is not accepted by everybody as true. This would cut our curriculum to very small proportions. We must welcome . . . discussion as shall suggest the means and prepare the way by which knowledge may be extended In all lines of academic investigation it is of the utmost importance that the investigator should be absolutely free to follow the indications of truth wherever they may lead. *Whatever may be the limitations, which trammel inquiry elsewhere, we believe the great state University of Wisconsin should ever encourage that continual and fearless sifting and winnowing by which alone the truth can be found.*⁸

The final sentence was engraved on the bronze plaque, and the class of 1910 took credit for the plaque's existence. Duffy claimed that “the committee alone was responsible for the inscription on the plaque and chose it that their class might leave a memorial that was really worth while.”⁹ In a newspaper interview Duffy stated that the incident might be in the news in the coming months and indicated that Lincoln Steffens was preparing an article about it.

Steffens, a journalist, editor, and reformer, was a founder of the “muckraking” movement. Muckrakers, so named by Theodore Roosevelt, were early twentieth century writers who exposed corruption and social evils in government and in labor. The muckrakers thrived on exposing scandal. Steffens' 1904 book *Shame of the Cities*, and his writing in *McClure's* magazine “aroused America's social conscience” and created support for reform movements.¹⁰ The young men likely were influenced by these writings, and Duffy's statement that Steffens was writing an article about the plaque suggests that Duffy had knowledge of Steffens' activities.

The board believed that Steffens' political agenda was behind the senior class decision to give the plaque and that the students were being used as a pawn to insult the Regents.¹¹ The refusal to display the plaque may have been triggered by political divisions between Stalwart and Progressive wings within the Republican Party rather than by controversy over academic free-

⁶ Herfurth, 63.

⁷ Herfurth, 66.

⁸ *Madison Democrat*, September 19, 1894.

⁹ “President Duffy Tells of Memorial,” *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*. June 30, 1910.

¹⁰ George B. Tindall, *America: A Narrative History*, v. II (New York: W. W. Norton, 1988), 942.

¹¹ Herfurth, 74.

dom or the search for the truth. It appears that most members of the senior class were fervent supporters of the Progressives, and many students believed that the Regents were solidly Stalwarts.¹² Duffy, who was among the students who supported the Progressives' goals, was likely influenced by their liberal ideals.

Following the Regents' rejection, the plaque gathered dust for several years. But class members Duffy, Milton J. Blair and William J. Meuer were not to be thwarted in their quest to have it displayed. To encourage good attendance at their five-year class reunion, they planned for the plaque to be "properly dedicated at Bascom Hall."¹³ They understood that the Regents' approval was needed for the dedication and erection of the memorial, but there was disagreement as to how this was to be obtained.

Class President Duffy and General Reunion Chairman Meuer worked to negotiate with the Regents to try to change their minds, while Attendance Chair Blair, working alone, assumed the Regents would not change their minds and sought to challenge them through negative comments in the *New Republic*.¹⁴ At the same time, posters appeared in Madison streetcars questioning the Regents' delay in displaying the plaque.

Duffy and Meuer followed their approach based on belief that, since Board membership had changed, the new members might be more agreeable to display of the plaque. They believed negotiation was the best approach. With the help of University of Wisconsin President Van Hise, they met with the Regents individually to state their case. However, when Blair's article in the *New Republic* and the posters appeared, President Van Hise became angry, believing that the class members were not "dealing in good faith."¹⁵ It took much persuasion on the part of Duffy and Meuer in dealing with the Board, Van Hise, and their former classmate Blair to defuse possible confrontation.

Duffy and Meuer found a compromise with a formula that enabled the Board to save face. The two agreed to write a letter to the Board stating, "upon careful investigation, we find that the events in the University during the school year 1909-10, were, in several instances, misrepresented at the time, and that, in fact, no action was taken by the Board of Regents which

¹² Herfurth, 69.

¹³ Merle Curti & Vernon Carstensen, *The University of Wisconsin: A History, 1848-1925*, v. II (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1974), 70.

¹⁴ *New Republic* 3, May 15, 1915.

¹⁵ *Madison Democrat*, September 19, 1894.

interfered with academic freedom at the University.”¹⁶ This statement, which was read at the dedication on June 15, 1915, marked the end of the dispute. Twenty-one years after the famous “sifting and winnowing” words were written, the plaque, proclaiming academic freedom and search for the truth, was dedicated at the reunion. Duffy, a politician and jurist in the making, read a statement from “Joseph E. Davies, a rising young Democrat from Milwaukee,” who stated, “The class of 1910 has rendered a great service to the University and to those ideals in education and government, which the University of Wisconsin has come to stand for in so splendid a way, throughout the world.”¹⁷

Duffy’s ability to speak and his negotiating skills were already evident in this conflict. He demonstrated traits of leadership, political acumen, problem solving, and dedication to search for truth throughout his life, which would embrace a remarkable career. Duffy was a man who walked with the famous, the infamous and not-so-famous; a man who was present when history was made and who was himself a significant participant in major events.

At the University of Wisconsin, Duffy was a member of the Phi Alpha Delta Law fraternity that hosted a reception for Governor Woodrow Wilson when Wilson appeared at the University of Wisconsin.¹⁸ As a soldier, Duffy was present when President Wilson arrived in Paris at the end of World War I. As a charter member of the American Legion, he worked hard for bonus legislation for World War I veterans and became involved in politics. As a United States Senator, he became the friend of two Presidents and was present when much important legislation was passed in the Senate. He was a man who could make tough decisions, even at his own expense. He was regarded highly enough to be chosen to give the dedication address for the Allied military cemetery at Flanders Field in Belgium. And he was a man who, as a judge, held in his hands the lives of many. Many words have been printed in newspapers about various aspects of the career of Francis Ryan Duffy. To date, however, there has not been a full-length biography that explores his long and successful career as Fond du Lac lawyer, soldier in World War I, American Legion leader, United States Senator and Federal Judge.

Physically, Duffy was, “a large man, shaped like an athlete, weighing about 200 pounds, 5 feet 10 inches tall, with a powerful chest, horn rimmed spectacles and hair that bristled as a

¹⁶ Herfurth, p. 85

¹⁷ Davies ran and was defeated in the special election for U.S. Senator in the spring of 1918 to fill the seat vacated by the death of Democrat Paul O. Husting, who had been killed in a hunting accident. *Wisconsin State Journal*, June 14, 1915.

¹⁸ Duffy Papers, “Wilson banqueted by Fraternity.” News clipping from unidentified paper (Oct 26, n.y.d).

Irishman's hair should bristle.”¹⁹ His deep bass voice and hearty laugh were still evident in an interview taped when he was 85 year old.²⁰ Duffy prided himself on his patriotism. He was a loyal American, a leader, and a dedicated citizen who believed in service. A gifted orator and writer, he was often called upon to speak at public events. He is arguably the most prominent American to have been born and educated in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Born in the city on June 23, 1888, Duffy practiced law in Fond du Lac from 1912 to 1939, served in the United States Senate from 1933 to 1939, was appointed a federal judge of the Eastern Wisconsin district in June 1939, and was appointed to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit in Chicago in 1949, a post he held until 1966. He semi-retired at age 78, although he continued to serve as a senior judge on the Federal Circuit Court of Appeals. While some may judge that his Senate years were the pinnacle of his career, Ryan Duffy “preferred the law.” In a 1967 interview, Duffy, then 78, said that he preferred the judiciary over the Senate.²¹ He served for 39 distinguished years as a judge.

Fond du Lac played an important part in F. Ryan Duffy's life. For 51 years he called 111 East First Street, the house where he was born, his home. The house is located at the corner of First Street and Park Avenue (formerly called Harney Street).²² Calling himself a “Fond du Lacer,” he always returned to Fond du Lac.²³ He attended public schools in the city until he left for College at the University of Wisconsin. Upon graduation he returned to practice law. He left Fond du Lac again to serve in the military. Following his discharge, he returned to practice law. He visited Fond du Lac frequently during his Senate years, and he continued to return “home” during his federal judgeship. Upon his death on August 16, 1979, he was interred in Fond du Lac at Calvary Cemetery.

¹⁹ “F. Ryan Duffy Finds Time in Busy Life to Be a ‘Family Man,’” Duffy for U.S. Senator, Pamphlet, 1932, Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

²⁰ Duffy Papers, Tape UC992A, Tape 1 Winter/1973.

²¹ “US Judge Duffy Prefers Bench to Seat in Senate,” by Richard Bradee, *Milwaukee Sentinel*. May 4, 1967.

²² Ruth S. Worthing, *The History of Fond du Lac County As Told by Its Place-Names*, 1976, 76. “Harney Street was changed to Park Avenue when Lakeside Park was developed and the street extended into the park.” The house number was subsequently changed to 213 East First St.

²³ F. Ryan Duffy's Memoirs. Duffy to William Draves, Managing Editor, *Fond du Lac Reporter*. April 2, 1970. On July 30, 1969, Wm. A. Draves, Managing Editor of the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* wrote to Duffy requesting him to “recount his political life.” Several letters passed between Mr. Draves and Judge Duffy, culminating in the completion of a memoir. Subsequently, a series of articles on Duffy's career appeared in the newspaper, April 11-May 8, 1970. Mrs. Alice Draves generously shared her late husband's file on Francis Ryan Duffy. The file remains in her possession.

²⁴ “US Judge Duffy Prefers Bench to Seat in Senate,” by Richard Bradee, *Milwaukee Sentinel*. May 4, 1967.

Francis Ryan Duffy was one of three children born to Harriet (Hattie) Ryan Duffy and Francis Fee Duffy. Hattie, the daughter of Kieran and Mary (Keys) Ryan, was born on the farm near Richwood in Dodge County where she spent her childhood.²⁴ Francis F. Duffy was born in Castle Blaney, County Monahan, Ireland, although his parents had originally immigrated to the United States and settled in Virginia in 1820. They returned to Ireland for a visit, and Francis Fee was born there on February 2, 1851.²⁵ Francis F. Duffy arrived in Fond du Lac on New Year's Day in 1876.²⁶ Duffy was a businessman and a partner in one of the leading law firms of [Fond du Lac].²⁷ From 1878-1879, he was the Fond du Lac City-Attorney and served as District Attorney from 1880-1886.

The Duffys had three children, Francis Ryan, born on June 23, 1888 and baptized at St. Joseph's Catholic Church on July 8, 1888, Lina N., born October 3, 1890, and Gladys Margaret, born October 6, 1892 and baptized November 20, 1892.²⁸ On November 21 1901, Hattie Duffy died at the age of forty-three leaving Ryan, age 13, Lina, age 11, and Margaret, age 8, to be raised by their father. It appears from correspondence that Duffy had a close relationship with his father and two sisters.²⁹

Duffy grew up in the city of Fond du Lac, attended public grade schools located on First and Second Streets, and graduated in 1906 from Fond du Lac High School, then located on Merrill Avenue.³⁰ As a child, Duffy spent time at Lakeside Park.³¹ He may have taken the streetcar to the end of the line at the north end of Main Street, where he could have watched the steamboats that were a common sight on the lake. He may have observed the development of the

²⁴ "Major Duffy May Give Address in City Next Month," *Times* (Watertown, Wisconsin), June 17, 1932.

²⁵ "Senator Back to Flanders Fields," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 10, 1970.

²⁶ The four years between F. F. Duffy leaving Virginia and his arrival in Fond du Lac on New Year's Day in 1876 remain undocumented.

²⁷ *Portrait and Biographical Album of Wisconsin*, Acme Publishing Company, 1885.

²⁸ *Registrum Baptizatorum in Ecclesia*, St. Joseph Catholic Church Baptism Records, Archdiocese of Milwaukee. The child's name was recorded as Francis Fee, not Francis Ryan, as he was known all his life. All other information, including parents and dates, is identical. Probably the priest baptizing F. Ryan chose not to use the name Ryan because it was not a "Catholic" name. Milwaukee Archdiocese indicated that pages are missing from St. Joseph, Fond du Lac Baptism, v. 2 1870-1901, 241-244, 245-246, and 249-250. No record was found for Lina or for Margaret Duffy.

²⁹ Duffy Papers, Scrapbook #1, family photographs and letters.

³⁰ Maurice J. McKenna, ed., *History of Fond du Lac County* (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912), v. I, 353. The Second Street School was a small wooden building, but the First Street School was larger. Neither building exists today. The Second Street School is the site of a playground. *Fond du Lac 150 Years 1836-1986*, Official booklet honoring the Sesquicentennial Celebration, Action Printing, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin. The booklet states that the Fond du Lac Senior High School was built in 1873. In 1925, it became Roosevelt Junior High School.

³¹ Duffy Papers, Scrapbook #1, undated photographs of Duffy. Caption indicates Lakeside Park as the location.

park when the bandstand and pavilion were built in the early 1900s.³² He probably enjoyed swimming at the old Swimming School at Lakeside Park, which had a huge water slide. He may have witnessed the beginning of electric streetcar service in Fond du Lac. With a keen interest in sports, the eleven-year-old Duffy may have watched Fond du Lac's "famed Company E" basketball team win the national basketball championship by defeating Yale University at the Armory E gym.³³ Or perhaps the eleven-year-old caught a glimpse of Buffalo Bill Cody's appearance in Fond du Lac on August 29, 1899. He probably attended the four-day Fond du Lac Street Fair in 1901, when thousands assembled for an event consisting of "parades, band concerts, high wire artists, dancing and harness races."³⁴ And like many youngsters then and now, he was a newspaper boy for the then *Daily Commonwealth*.

Ryan Duffy's speaking and leadership abilities, service to others, and involvement in organizations were evident early in his life. In high school, he was elected class president, participated in football, basketball and track, and was a member of the debate team. With other students, he formed the Inner Circle Debating Team, which was very successful in its competitions. In March 1906, Duffy and his teammates, John Crosby and Harold Wilkie, debated a Sheboygan team "in one of the most spirited debates ever witnessed in the city." The topic was public ownership versus private ownership of street railways and lighting plans in cities with a population of 25,000. Duffy was the last speaker for the affirmative, and it was noted that "he possesses a style of oratory entirely different from the other speakers" and was described as "convincing, yet with a strain of humor."³⁵

The young Duffy enjoyed life but was not afraid of hard work.³⁶ A 1906 newspaper article featuring recent high school graduates and their summer jobs included the eighteen year-old F. Ryan Duffy "as working for a cement contractor doing hard work in that line without flinching. These young men, though ambitious, are not ashamed of the work they are doing and someday they are likely to be at the top of their ladder."³⁷ This prophetic comment proved to be true, as Duffy's lifetime achievements and accomplishments were numerous.

³² *Lakeside Park: Past Present Future*. June 1976. League of Women Voters of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

³³ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 1991), 118. The armory on East Second St was demolished in 1980 as part of an urban renewal project.

³⁴ Mentzer, 123.

³⁵ Duffy Papers, Scrapbooks, Unidentified newspaper clipping, Saturday, March 31, 1906

³⁶ "Hardships, Humor Recalled As Graduates of 1906 Gather," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 9, 1956.

³⁷ Duffy Papers, Newspaper article, 1906, Wisconsin State Historical Society, Micro Reel 1086, Reel 1.

Duffy continued debating as an undergraduate student at the University of Wisconsin, and his debating team was awarded the William F. Vilas Gold Medal.³⁸ Described as a “witty Irishman” with a sense of humor, he apparently enjoyed telling jokes and stories. He also participated in cross-country on a team that won second place at the Big Ten Conference, and he was president of his senior class.³⁹ Duffy graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1910, and he then entered law school at the University.

Duffy handled his first case in April of 1912, even before he completed his law degree. It was noted in the local newspaper that he appeared before Justice Fairbanks for the plaintiff in the case, and that M. K. Reilly was the defense attorney. “Mr. Duffy handled the case in such a way that it brought forth praise on every side. He handled the witnesses with a deftness that is usually found only in attorneys of considerable experience.” Duffy was credited “in the opening arguments of bringing out the principal facts with the same ability which he has shown in many debates.” He “picked out the weak spots and the flaws in the evidence of the adverse witnesses.”⁴⁰ Once again, Duffy was credited with the ability to speak well.

Duffy graduated from the University of Wisconsin with a law degree in June 1912.⁴¹ After receiving his degree, he joined his father's law firm, and they formed the partnership of Duffy and Duffy, where he worked until the United States entered World War I.

In July 1914, war was threatening in Europe, and within weeks it became a full-blown conflict, including all the major nations of Europe. The United States avoided involvement until, after three years, when it declared war on Germany in April 1917. Duffy, a member of the Officer's Reserve, was called to active duty when war was declared.⁴² He entered active military service on May 9, 1917, at Fort Sam Houston, Texas, where he was commissioned as a Captain.⁴³ He was stationed at Fort Brown, Texas, on the Mexican border, prior to leaving for Europe.

³⁸ “Judge Duffy Recalls 1932 Convention of Democrats,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 8, 1970.

³⁹ “Ryan Duffy Heads Seniors,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, March, 1910.

⁴⁰ “Ryan Duffy Tries His First Case,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 26, 1912.

⁴¹ Duffy Papers, Citation by Prof. Weaver, 1952 Univ. Wisconsin Commencement, June 20, 1952, Box 5, Folder 2.

⁴² Duffy Papers, Scrapbook 2, War Department to F. Ryan Duffy, January 5, 1917, “Letter appealing to your patriotism and join The Quartermaster Officers’ Reserve Corps, U.S. Army.”

⁴³ “Duffy Receives U.S. Captaincy,” *The Reporter*, April 12, 1917.

Major F. Ryan Duffy in World War I Uniform, 1919

Two months before Duffy left for overseas duty in 1918, he requested a leave of absence, “on or about January 22, 1918,” to marry Anna Louise Haydon, daughter of Mr. and Mrs. G. L. Haydon of Springfield, Kentucky.⁴⁴ Louise and Duffy had met through a college roommate, probably J. A. Barber of Springfield, Kentucky, whom Duffy visited in Louisville. Louise could verify Duffy's persuasive powers of speech. In a 1932 interview, she stated, “he argued me into marrying him and leaving Louisville to come up north, where it gets awfully cold.”⁴⁵

On March 29, 1918, Ryan Duffy set sail for Europe aboard the *USS President Lincoln*, and he arrived in France on April 13, 1918.⁴⁶ The Fond du Lac County War History records indicate he was in the Motor Transport Corps in support of the Meuse-Argonne offensive.⁴⁷ Duffy was promoted to the rank of Major on October 7, 1918, and he served in France until his honorable discharge, May 29, 1919.⁴⁸

During the month following the signing of the Armistice on November 11, 1918, Major Duffy, Assistant Chief Motor Transport Officer in Base Section No. 1, traveled through the war-torn areas of northern France, particularly those areas that had been involved in the American actions on the Marne. In a letter to his wife addressed “Dearest Weese,” he described President Woodrow Wilson's arrival in Paris in December 1918 and the devastation caused by the war.⁴⁹

It appears that these impressions were firmly etched in Duffy's mind, especially from his behavior in ensuing years, when he was called upon to give patriotic speeches. He appreciated his country and delighted in administering the oath of allegiance to new citizens. His experience was also apparent in judicial cases in which he dealt with draft evasion or with disloyalty.

In May 1919, Duffy, now thirty-one, returned to Fond du Lac, to his wife, Louise, and to the law practice in the partnership begun with his father in 1912, the firm of Duffy, Duffy and

⁴⁴ “Capt. F.R. Duffy, to C.O. Brownsville District, Brownsville, Texas, December 18, 1917.”

⁴⁵ Duffy for U.S. Senator, “Boys Trained by Candidate,” Campaign literature, 1932. Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

⁴⁶ Duffy Papers, Madison, Scrapbook v. 2. German torpedoes sank the *USS President Lincoln* on May 31, 1918. Statement of Edward Victor Isaacs, U.S.N., November 13, 1918, taken prisoner from the *Lincoln*. U.S. Naval Forces Operating in European Waters, *USS Melville*, London, England. F. Ryan Duffy Papers, Scrapbook 2, v. I of the War Record of F. Ryan Duffy.

⁴⁷ Fond du Lac County War History Committee, Adams House, Fond du Lac Historical Society; Tindall, v. 2, 1009. “The Meuse-Argonne offensive involved 1.2 million American troops, and was the largest American action of the war, in a drive toward Sedan and its railroad that supplied the entire German front.”

⁴⁸ Duffy Papers, Scrapbook v. 2, “War Department Office of the Chief, Motor Transport Corps, Washington,” May 27, 1919.

⁴⁹ Duffy Papers, Scrapbook v. 2, F. Ryan Duffy to Louise Duffy, December 24, 1918.

Hanson.⁵⁰ He served two years as president of the Eighteenth Judicial District Bar Association and was appointed Circuit Court Commissioner. Duffy and Louise settled into their home on the corner of Park Avenue and First Street, joined by Ryan's father Francis.⁵¹ In the years that followed, they had four children, Ann, F. Ryan Jr., Haydon and James. Ryan Duffy also became active in community affairs.

He was much sought after as an orator, speaking at dedications of war memorials and at many other events in surrounding communities. Many of his speeches were about patriotism and love of country. At the dedication of a bronze memorial tablet at the Waupun Library honoring those who gave their lives in World War I, he called on people to, "Learn to love America more. Keep ever engraved in your hearts that emblem of the *Star Spangled Banner*. Remember the sacrifices that these soldier boys made for it."⁵² On another occasion, he spoke about the League of Nations, from the Soldier's point of view, in Springfield, Kentucky. It was said, "a more brilliant talk has not been heard in the Old Court House in Springfield, and those who failed to hear him missed a rare treat."⁵³ At an Independence Day celebration in Fond du Lac, he addressed the Rotary Club, "If there are grievances there are ways by which they may be adjusted without resorting to force. Just remember," he said, "that these are the United States and that we must remain united if we are to endure."⁵⁴ This was a recurring theme in his rhetoric.

Always a persuasive man with a quick wit and sense of humor, Duffy and other members of his bowling team were confined to a hotel because of bad weather while attending a Knights of Columbus tournament. Someone bet that Duffy could not select a name at random from the telephone book and sell them a dog. He did it, and the lady actually agreed to buy an Airedale dog. He appeared to enjoy a good time and was also a member of the "Four Leaf Clover Club," which met at Oscar Ward's Tavern—not a community service organization—where he enjoyed "lustily singing Irish ballads."⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Duffy for U.S. Senator Literature. Duffy United Choice of Party at State Meet, 1932. Fond du Lac Historical Society. Russell Hanson joined the law firm when Ryan Duffy was in the army.

⁵¹ "FDL's First B & B is still its best kept secret," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, July 19, 2000. The home was designated an historic site by the Fond du Lac Historic Preservation Commission and called the Bissell-Duffy House.

⁵² Duffy Papers, Scrapbook 1, "Shun Agitators, Love Country, Pleas of Duffy," unidentified, undated newspaper.

⁵³ Newspaper article, Sunday, October 14, unidentified newspaper. In all likelihood Duffy was visiting his wife's family.

⁵⁴ "Patriotic meet for Rotary Club," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, July (1923?).

⁵⁵ *The Circuit Rider*, "Activities of Francis Ryan Duffy," Vol. The First and Last, May 6, 1959. (Humorous paper written for a Duffy event).

A more respectable organization that he joined was the American Legion. He was a charter member of the A. M. Trier Legion Post in Fond du Lac. As four million soldiers returned from war, the United States entered a short, sharp economic depression. Millions lost their jobs. The Legion became a sort of nationwide employment service. Many Veterans looked to the Legion for help finding jobs, and more than a million found work this way. The Legion also began its fight for the relief of wounded and disabled veterans, making claims for compensation. Many looked to the Legion for help, and Duffy became increasingly involved in its efforts.

He served in various Legion leadership posts at the state and national level, was elected state commander in 1922-23, national vice commander at the San Francisco convention in October 1923, and was a member of the national executive committee until 1925.⁵⁶ Thirty-four years later, in June 1959, Duffy was honored by Trier Puddy Post 57 and presented with a life membership in the post.⁵⁷ He was proud of his membership in the Legion. A 1968 photograph shows him proudly wearing his Past Department Commander's ring.⁵⁸

Service in the Legion led him naturally into politics, and the catalyst for this move was "the bonus." The Adjusted Compensation Act of 1924 granted a \$1,000 bonus to all military personnel who had served in World War I, in recognition of their war service. This bonus was to be distributed in 1945. By 1932, due to the Depression, veterans were demanding that the bonus be paid without further delay.

The bonus issue became explosive politics when fifteen thousand jobless World War I veterans, who formed the Bonus Expeditionary Forces (BEF), set up a protest camp in Washington, D.C. They wanted immediate payment of the bonus certificates. Some historians indicate that President Herbert Hoover ordered the military to drive the "bonus army" from the city.⁵⁹ However, David Lisio, in *The President and Protest*, exonerates Hoover and shows that General Douglas MacArthur far exceeded his orders when his troops marched on the BEF.⁶⁰ But Hoover was portrayed at the time as a villain. It seemed that Hoover was oblivious to the army and their needs, when in fact Hoover had been "exceptionally generous and patient with the

⁵⁶ *Wisconsin Blue Book 1937*, Wisconsin Members of 73rd Congress, 440. "Biographical Sketch of Judge F. Ryan Duffy," November 8, 1944, Duffy papers, Box 1, Folder 1.

⁵⁷ *Wisconsin Department Adjutant's Weekly Notes*, Judge F. Ryan Duffy. June 3, 1959, v. 5. No., 2.

⁵⁸ *Badger Legionnaire*, August 1968. Duffy Papers, Scrapbook v. 3, #17.

⁵⁹ Tindall, v. II, 1106.

⁶⁰ Donald J. Lisio, *The President and Protest: Hoover, MacArthur, and the Bonus Riot* (N.Y.: Fordham University Press, 1994), 167.

veterans” and worked closely with Superintendent of Police Pelham Glassford.⁶¹ Hoover’s aid to and support of the BEF was unrecognized, however, because initially he ignored the veterans. General MacArthur, who decided to drive them out, disobeyed presidential orders. Many Americans, including Duffy, who was sympathetic to the veterans’ plight, sided with the bonus marchers and were appalled that the veterans were fired on with tear gas. It was difficult for Hoover to regain the image of the man who was honored for saving thousands of Russians from starvation following World War I. Without a doubt, the Bonus Riot had a negative effect on the 1932 election.

Duffy toured 14 states, urging passage of bonus legislation. He identified with the veterans, because he, himself, had served. His work on the American veterans legislation helped develop in him a deep interest in national politics, and his work with the veterans and many contacts became a stepping-stone for entry into politics.

In 1932, the nation was in the throes of the Great Depression, with high unemployment, failing businesses, closing banks, and falling agricultural prices. Millions were unemployed, thirty million people were on welfare, and bankrupt local governments could not handle the load. Relief rolls continued to rise, but homes and possessions had to be sold before people could get assistance. People were desperate. Children missed school because there was no money for food. In Chicago, teachers went without pay for five of thirteen months. More than 20 per cent of the children in New York, and 90 per cent in the mining counties of Ohio, West Virginia, Illinois, Kentucky and Pennsylvania suffered from malnutrition. In Wisconsin during the 1930s, over half of the banks failed, about 1,500 businesses shut down, the value of manufacturing fell from \$960 million to \$375 million, and farm income fell from \$350 million to \$199 million.⁶²

Descriptions of starvation and of destitute people appeared in the news on a daily basis. Reporters stated that President Hoover, isolated in the White House, told reporters, “Nobody is actually starving.” Other information suggests that Hoover was compassionate and concerned about his fellow man, but this isolation became a great issue against him in the 1932 election.

Ryan Duffy frequently stated that he was not interested in seeking political office; however, the “Depression” years changed his mind. Years later, in an interview, Duffy said, “When the banks began to close and hundreds of thousands of men lost their jobs, the country

⁶¹ Lisio, 55, 297. Glassford, the son of a career officer, was a West Point graduate who rose to the rank of general, had a distinguished military career, and received the Distinguished Service Cross following World War I.

⁶² Sheila Reaves, *Wisconsin, a Story of Progress* (Windsor Publications, Inc., 1988), 167.

really was in a mess. I firmly believed that the then Governor of New York, Franklin D. Roosevelt, was the man who could lead us out of our miseries.”⁶³

The Depression left its mark on the American people, and many wanted change in 1932. The Democrats offered that change. The Wisconsin State Democratic convention met in Fond du Lac on January 23, 1932, at the Retlaw Hotel and at the Armory. Duffy, chosen as the chairman of Wisconsin's delegation to the Democratic Convention in Chicago in 1932, supported Franklin D. Roosevelt. Confident in his fellow Democrats' support, he sought the Wisconsin United States Senate seat that was being contested as well.

The State Democratic Conference was held in Green Bay on June 11, 1932. Three candidates were endorsed for the U.S. Senate seat: F. Ryan Duffy from Fond du Lac, John M. Callahan from Milwaukee, and William H. Frawley from Eau Claire. Duffy, portrayed in his campaign literature as a family man and man of faith with strong principles that characterized his private and professional life, had been urged by a committee of Democrats to run for Governor instead. But Duffy wasn't interested, and he preferred to seek the office of United States Senator.⁶⁴ His friends argued that he could not defeat Senator John Blaine. Duffy's response was he would “rather be defeated for United States Senator than to win the Governorship since the Governor's two-year term was so short he would have to start campaigning for re-election before he even got the Governor's chair warm.”⁶⁵ He won the nomination for the Senate. It may have been the enthusiastic support he received at the Green Bay convention that prompted other Democratic candidates to drop out, thus giving Duffy the nomination by default.⁶⁶

The Democrats were very optimistic about the election. They nominated New York Governor Franklin D. Roosevelt as their presidential candidate and Speaker of the House John Garner of Texas as his running mate. President Herbert Hoover and Vice President Charles Curtis were both nominated by the Republican Party. The Republicans knew they had a slim chance of winning the election. The campaign raised questions about political trends in Wisconsin, because the state had traditionally been strongly Republican. The Republicans, who had dominated Wisconsin politics for nearly eighty years, were engaged in a struggle between

⁶³ “Duffy—Faith in Franklin D. Roosevelt,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 8, 1970.

⁶⁴ “Duffy Their Man,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 17, 1932.

⁶⁵ F. Ryan Duffy Memoirs. Duffy to Wm. Draves, 6

⁶⁶ “Duffy Not Spectacular But His Public Rise Is,” *Milwaukee Journal*, Nov. 9, 1932.

the “Progressives,” led by Philip La Follette, and the conservative “Stalwart” factions of the Republican Party.

Duffy's opponent in the 1932 general election was Republican John B. Chapple, a young editor from Ashland, Wisconsin who had defeated incumbent John Blaine in the primary, which itself suggested what might happen to incumbents. Duffy's issues in the election centered on whether Wisconsinites should elect a Senator who supported the record of the Hoover administration and the Republicans, or a Democrat who wanted change. Chapple's mistake was to continue to use the same challenges he had used against Blaine. The “Red Menace,” the central theme of his campaign, hardly applied to World War I veteran Duffy, who claimed he was “fighting to preserve America for Americans,” and touted his “strong family values,” and views as a “man of faith.”⁶⁷ Duffy challenged Chapple “to stop fighting Blaine and the La Follettes, Karl Marx and Russia.”⁶⁸

Beside Bonus legislation, Duffy's campaign proposed few specifics. He did favor absolute repeal of the XVIII Amendment, Prohibition, and immediate modification of the Volstead Act, which banned the manufacture, sale or transport of intoxicating liquors. He supported an array of general concepts that were not likely to produce campaign negatives in Wisconsin: protective tariff, but not an embargo; “America for Americans,” and opposition to Hoover's “internationalism.” Duffy also proposed no more exploitation of natural resources, as he wanted the public to derive the greatest benefit from them. He also wanted to eliminate useless federal bureaucracy, to shorten the working week, and to help the farmers.

Perhaps more important than his message was his devotion to vigorous campaigning and his consistent message that he supported Roosevelt. Duffy traveled throughout the state, logging about 10,000 miles by train and automobile, delivering speeches in person and on the radio. He stressed the importance of Governor Roosevelt's election more than his own, and this was an obvious tactic for such a political neophyte.⁶⁹

Louise Duffy remained outside the political arena. In a rare 1932 interview she replied to a question about campaigning with her husband that “I've heard about Mrs. Kohler and Mrs. La Follette going out and campaigning for their husbands, but I don't know how I'd find time for

⁶⁷ “Pledge 100% to Roosevelt Platform,” F. Ryan Duffy for U.S. Senate, 1932. Election campaign material. Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

⁶⁸ “Whom is Chapple Fighting?” *The Milwaukee Journal*, October 7, 1932.

⁶⁹ “Duffy Bases His Drives on National Issues.” *Prairie Du Chien, Wisconsin*, October 12, 1932.

that, with four children to take care. No one has said anything bad about Ryan yet, so I guess there's nothing for me to say anyhow."⁷⁰

Duffy was elected as part of the Democratic landslide, along with Madison Mayor A. G. Schmedeman, who was elected Governor, defeating Republican incumbent Walter J. Kohler. Duffy received 222,569 more votes than Chapple.⁷¹ It was a surprise that such a political unknown would be nominated and elected to the Senate, having only previously run for District Attorney. A year before his election, Duffy had been a leading lawyer in Fond du Lac and was little known outside of American Legion circles, where he was a state commander. His rise to the Senate was certainly related to the desire of the electorate for change.

The question to consider in regard to Duffy's victory is whether he was swept into office only on the coattails of Roosevelt, or whether his victory was due to his own merit. Certainly he campaigned as an extension of Roosevelt's message, but several issues helped elect Duffy to the Senate in 1932: the political climate, the economic crisis which cried out for change, Duffy's charm, the impression he gave of a strong moral character, and the electorate's frustration with Hoover. The disarray and divisions among Republicans and the lack of political savvy by his opponent sealed Duffy's victory.

Having won as a member of the Roosevelt team, Duffy still asserted his independence. In an appearance in Neenah just before Inauguration, he stated that he would go to Washington with an open mind on the pressing questions of the day. "I will vote upon them as I see their merit, I will not be swayed by any hope or wish of re-election"⁷²

When Duffy took his place in the Senate, he was seated in the front row on the Democratic side, with Senator Huey Long of Louisiana on his right and Senator Richard Russell immediately behind him. The infamous Long "was a man who had bitter enemies and many devoted friends."⁷³ Duffy told Long, "Huey, I don't know that I like the idea of me sitting next to you." Long suggested Duffy move. Duffy replied, "Some one up in the gallery might start shooting at you and hit me." There was unconscious irony in Duffy's words, because Senator Long was assassinated September 8, 1935, in the Louisiana State Capitol in Baton Rouge.

⁷⁰ Duffy for U.S. Senate, 1932 Campaign Literature, "F. Ryan Duffy Finds Time in Busy Life to be 'Family Man.'"

⁷¹ James R. Donoghue, *How Wisconsin Voted, 1848-1954* (Madison: Bureau of Government, University Extension Division, 1956).

⁷² "Dollar is No Longer Trade Medium-Duffy," *News Times*, January 31, 1933.

⁷³ Duffy Memoirs to Draves. 7.

Though the Senate galleries were packed when Long spoke, Duffy believed the Louisiana Senator was a lonely person. Sometimes, when Duffy and his wife were leaving the Mayflower Hotel, where Long also stayed, he would ask to join the Duffys. They were happy to have his company.⁷⁴ However, things were not always so congenial between the two men.

Duffy and Long were on opposite sides of the issue of a treaty with Canada dealing with the construction of a joint power and navigation project that would make the St. Lawrence sea-way better able to accommodate larger vessels. Duffy favored the 27-foot deep waterway that would connect the Atlantic Ocean and the head of Lake Superior, benefiting Wisconsin commerce and industry. Duffy believed that the American mid-continent was within its rights to demand that its land-locked situation be changed. He considered it “petty sectional arguments” to delay the decision on the treaty. Long led the opposition against the treaty, even though his own state had benefited from \$35,000,000 in federal funds for dredging to make New Orleans a seaport.⁷⁵ The Senate failed to ratify the treaty when it came to a vote in 1934.

In the Senate, Duffy served on several important committees, including the Foreign Relations, Military Affairs, Appropriations, Patents, Interoceanic Canals, and Privileges and Elections Committees, although his primary areas of interest were national defense and copyright legislation. As a freshman Senator, he sponsored few pieces of legislation. He did sponsor the Duffy Copyright Bill, which proposed drastic revision of the copyright laws. After holding control of the floor for eight days, Duffy managed to get the bill passed by the Senate in the first session of 74th Congress.⁷⁶

The bill’s primary purpose was to protect American authors, composers, songwriters, artists, and including dramatic and cinematographic producers.⁷⁷ This would automatically extend copyright protection of an American’s work to fifty treaty nations. Another provision dealt with the rise of radio broadcasting and just compensation for the composers. The bill would have eliminated the \$250 automatic minimum penalty for copyright infringement.⁷⁸ Unfortunately, this legislation did not pass in the House of Representatives.

Despite the fact that isolationism prevailed in Wisconsin politics, Duffy supported “substantial defense expenditures,” a not unexpected stance, in view of his military experience and

⁷⁴ Duffy Memoirs to Draves. 10.

⁷⁵ *The Journal*, Antigo, Wisconsin, September 18, 1933.

⁷⁶ “Roosevelt Appoints Duffy Judge for This District,” *Sheboygan Press*, June 21, 1954.

⁷⁷ “The Copyright Bill,” *Washington Post*, Editorial, January 4, 1936.

⁷⁸ “Senator Duffy Accomplished Notable Feat,” *Milwaukee Journal*, August 11, 1935.

ties to the American Legion. As a member of the Foreign Relations and Military Affairs Committees, he also served as a member of an American economic and diplomatic mission to China, Japan, and the Philippines; once again, he was present when history was made.⁷⁹

As guests of the Philippine government, a Congressional Good-Will Tour participated in the Commonwealth Government inauguration of President Manuel Quezon at Manila, held on November 15, 1935. Most members of the delegation served on the Foreign Affairs or Insular Relations Committees of the Senate and House of Representatives. Initially, Senator Alben Barkley of Kentucky had planned to go. When Barkley dropped out, Missouri Senator Harry B. Hawes, who represented the Philippines in legal matters, asked Duffy, who was in Chicago holding hearings for the Military Affairs committee, to go in his place.

Duffy at first declined the invitation, believing the time was too short, because he and his family were planning to leave that night to return to Washington and put the boys in school.⁸⁰ However, after a whirlwind of activities, he made the necessary arrangements—the boys stayed in Fond du Lac—and Duffy and Louise left by train for Minneapolis and Seattle, where they boarded the American Mail Liner *President Grant* on October 16, 1935. The entourage included Vice President Garner, Speaker of the House Byrnes, seventeen Senators, twenty-five Congressmen, and a number of the “foremost newspaper men in America.” Vice President Garner and his wife were assigned chairs next to the Duffys, and they “enjoyed many pleasant visits and social hours during the long sea journey.”⁸¹

When the party arrived in Yokohama, Japan, about fifty newspapermen boarded the ship, bringing with them a large number of carrier pigeons. They took many pictures, developed them on the ship, and attached the finished photos to the pigeons. The Tokyo papers published the pictures almost before the Americans got off the ship. The American delegation visited several cities in Japan, including Kamakura, Kobe, Tokyo, and Kyoto, the ancient capital of Japan, where they visited an “Imperial Palace.”⁸² Duffy easily adjusted to the Japanese custom of taking off his shoes indoors, but he had difficulty with chopsticks. Always a man with a sense of humor, he considered “whittling one down to a fine point and making a sort of spear out of it.”

⁷⁹ “Duffy Accepts Invitation for Insular Tour,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, October 12, 1935.

⁸⁰ “Duffy Is Invited for Manila Trip,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 12, 1935.

⁸¹ “Senator F. Ryan Duffy to Editor,” *Sheboygan Press*, (ca, January, 1936). Duffy prepared an account of the trip to Japan, China and the Philippines, at the request of the newspaper. Unless otherwise indicated, subsequent references to this trip are taken from this account.

⁸² Duffy’s reference to an Imperial Palace may have been an Imperial residence, he does not specify in his account of the trip which of the several Imperial residences he visited in Kyoto.

The group stayed in the Philippines for twelve days, and each member was provided with a guide, many of whom were graduates of American universities. The Duffys were among the few who were invited to Manuel Quezon's home for dinner. Duffy described Quezon as a "brilliant, capable statesman," the inauguration as an "inspiring sight," and the inaugural parade, representing all parts of the islands, as "very colorful."

The final leg of the journey included a visit to Hong Kong and a train trip to Canton. On their return to the United States, many declared, "in spite of the many attractions of the Orient, they were convinced that there was no place on 'God's green footstool' like our good old USA."

In news reports that followed the trip, Duffy described his observations. "Senator Duffy arrived in Fond du Lac Friday with a conviction that Japan is intent on capturing the commercial markets of the world." He continued, "Japan, intensely nationalistic and highly geared industrially, is one of the busiest nations in the world and there is a purpose behind it."⁸³ Duffy shared the sentiments of many Americans who were increasingly critical of Japan. "The Japanese gave the Americans a cold reception; whereas the Chinese were more cordial and I was much impressed with the great resources of the Philippines."⁸⁴

Duffy continued to be regarded as a self-confident and a gifted orator, and it may have been this gift of speech, coupled to his military service in World War I, that gave Duffy and his wife the opportunity, in 1937, to join United States Ambassadors Hugh S. Gibson and Josephus Daniels to make yet another trip abroad. They were among those representing the United States at the dedication of an American Chapel in Flanders Field, Belgium and at American monuments in France dedicated to fallen U.S. servicemen.⁸⁵ According to Duffy, dignitaries included, "General John Pershing of the United States; commanding generals from France and Belgium, Sir Admiral Beatty, commander of the British fleet; Paul von Zeland, Prime Minister of Belgium; and other high officials from France and Belgium."⁸⁶ Duffy gave an address at

⁸³ "Senator Duffy Returns After 2-Month Trip," *Sheboygan Press*, December 21, 1935.

⁸⁴ "Japan Declared Keen Competitor," *Milwaukee Journal*, December 24, 1935.

⁸⁵ "U.S. Chapel is Dedicated in Flanders; Belgian Honor Heroes at Waereghem," *New York Times*, August 9, 1937.

⁸⁶ "Senator Back to Flanders Field," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, April 10, 1970, 5. The reference to Admiral. Beatty, who commanded the British fleet, is inaccurate. First Earl David Beatty of the North Sea and Brooksby became commander-in-chief of the Grand Fleet in December 1916, Admiral of the Fleet November 1, 1919, and served in that position until July 30, 1927. He died in 1936. In 1937, the First Sea Lord was Admiral Sir A. Ernle M. Chatfield. Stephen Roskill, in *Naval Policy Between the Wars* (N.Y.: Walker and Co., 1968), 44, described Beatty at the end of World War I as "the best-known Admiral in the world and a figure of international as well as national standing." Duffy's memory, at age 82, may have failed him, and he misspoke, or else he may have been misquoted.

Flanders Field on August 8, 1937. As part of his speech, he made a call for the resolution of disputes without recourse to another war, a sentiment held by many at the time:

The hope of our soldiers in entering into the conflict was that they might assist in bringing about enduring peace. But in retrospect comes once again the realization of the futility of war. It has very rarely solved permanently any great question. If the soldiers who are buried out here could sit up in their graves and speak to us today, it would be to give voice to the agonizing question, 'Cannot some other means be found to settle international disputes?'⁸⁷

Soon after his return from Europe, Duffy began his campaign for reelection to the Senate. In preparation for the fall election, a testimonial for Duffy was held in Fond du Lac in February 1938. Many dignitaries came to the city, including keynote speaker Alben Barkley of Kentucky, who became Vice President under Harry Truman. President Roosevelt sent his endorsement in a letter to Leo Crowley, dated February 4, 1938, stating he was glad Crowley was planning to attend the testimonial for "our good friend F. Ryan Duffy." Roosevelt continued, "You know what we think of Ryan, and I want his home folks to know it too. By his loyalty, his unswerving devotion to what he thinks right, and his liberal viewpoint on all the great problems confronting us, he is rendering a great public service. I know that they are as proud of him as we are."⁸⁸

Duffy's liberal views often put him in disagreement with conservatives who dominated the Wisconsin Democratic party in the 1930s. His relations with his party became even more complicated when, in 1934, the Progressives first appeared on the ballot, signaling that he was unlikely to obtain their support, as he had in 1932.

One week before the election President Roosevelt confirmed his support of Duffy again by means of a telegram that was read at a rally held for Duffy at the Eagles Club. Roosevelt wired,

As you know, I have previously indicated my interest in the campaign of Senator Duffy. Ryan always has co-operated loyally. He is a real friend of liberal government. I sincerely hope that the great liberal state of Wisconsin will not diminish its strength in the Senate of the United States by entrusting to one [Wiley or Ekern] who is neither liberal in heart nor in mind the vitally important duty of representing Wisconsin in the Senate."⁸⁹

Despite the President's endorsement, Duffy still was not well known nationally. In fact, such an astute historian of American politics as Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., in his *The Politics of*

⁸⁷ Duffy, *Memoirs to Draves*. 15.

⁸⁸ Franklin Roosevelt to Leo T. Crowley, February 4, 1938, Franklin D. Roosevelt Library, P.P.F 443.

⁸⁹ "Senator Duffy Wins Approval of Roosevelt," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 2, 1938.

Upheaval, could inaccurately identify Duffy as a “conservative Democrat.”⁹⁰ But President Roosevelt’s endorsement was not enough to counter the effects of the La Follettes and the Progressives. It was clear that the 1938 election would be difficult for Duffy to win.

The national Democratic Party understood the situation. Prior to the 1938 election, President Roosevelt offered Duffy a seat on the United States Court of Appeals in Chicago.⁹¹ Duffy declined, because of his commitment to the Wisconsin electorate, even though he felt his chances for reelection were slim. The La Follette Progressives planned to run a complete ticket in the 1938 election, including Herman Ekern, a candidate for the United States Senate.⁹² Until 1934, the Progressives had been a group within the Republican Party, but in 1934, the Wisconsin Progressive Party first appeared on the ballot as a political organization that was independent of the two major parties.⁹³ Duffy’s assessment was that this would split the liberal vote and probably ensure his defeat.

Duffy’s assumption turned out to be correct. Not only was he defeated by his Republican opponent, Alexander Wiley, but he was also outpolled by the Progressive candidate, Herman Ekern. His third place finish garnered Duffy only 231,976 votes in 1938, whereas he had received 610,236 votes in 1932.

Even in Fond du Lac County, Wiley received nearly twice Duffy’s vote, despite the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*’s endorsement of Duffy. The editorial endorsing Duffy credited him for “working earnestly, ably, diligently and faithfully at all times in a constant effort to best perform the multiplicity of duties and meet the responsibilities the position involved,” and cited his “ability and training in offices of public trust.”⁹⁴

Were there other reasons for Duffy’s defeat, apart from the decision of the Progressives, who had supported Duffy in 1932, to run their own candidate for the Senate in 1938? What else might have caused such a significant shift in voter support away from Duffy? Republicans certainly received some support from conservative Democrats, and some dissatisfied Democrats supported the Progressives.⁹⁵ The huge shift in the number of votes cast for Duffy might partly be attributable to the adverse publicity he received when “the income tax reports of his law firm

⁹⁰ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Politics of Upheaval*. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1960), 139.

⁹¹ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, April 1970.

⁹² *Wisconsin Blue Book*, The General Election Summary Vote for United States Senator by Counties, November 1938, 611.

⁹³ Donoghue, 2.

⁹⁴ “Reelect Them,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 2, 1938.

⁹⁵ “Heavy Vote Cast in Wisconsin,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 8, 1938.

during his six years of office were compared with his pre-senatorial years. In Fond du Lac, his home county, his law firm practically enjoyed a monopoly in Home Owner Loan corporation mortgage foreclosures,” a form of business that was likely to inflame the passions of many ordinary people who lost their homes in the depression.⁹⁶ In 1932, his firm also reported an income of \$18,000, with Duffy’s salary standing at \$5,100, and in 1936, he received \$8,000, while the firm earned \$41,000. In the preceding years, when many lost all they had, this evidence of personal financial gain may have contributed significantly to his electoral defeat.

Duffy’s voting record may also have played a role in his defeat. The Republican candidate, Wiley, charged that Duffy was having difficulty explaining his votes in the Senate.⁹⁷ He accused Duffy of being a “yes man” to President Roosevelt, stating that he looked to Hyde Park so much that he might as well represent the President’s home state.⁹⁸ The implied suggestion that Duffy was not alert to local Wisconsin interests may have hit home with some voters.

Charges of campaign irregularities also bedeviled Duffy’s campaign. He was accused of misuse of his franking privileges in mailing postcards that contained extracts from a speech printed in the Congressional Record. Edward A. Bacon, Vice-Chairman of the Wisconsin Republican State Central Committee, wired the Senate Campaign Expenses Committee that a campaign postcard was in violation, because it contained comments on Duffy’s behalf. Bacon charged that the postcard bore an excerpt from the speech given by Alben Barkley at the testimonial dinner for Duffy in Fond du Lac. Duffy responded that Bacon’s charge was a “last ditch effort to discredit a clean campaign which I have carried on without any resort to mud-slinging. There is nothing illegal or unlawful in circulating extracts of a speech which has been printed in the Congressional Record.” He continued, “Mr. Bacon knows that.”⁹⁹ The Senate Campaign Expenditures Committee took no action on the complaint and ruled in Duffy’s favor.¹⁰⁰ However, this type of publicity certainly must have had a negative effect on voters.

Yet another issue that may have affected the election was a charge brought against Duffy by former Representative William H. Stafford of Milwaukee, an unsuccessful Republican senatorial candidate who had been defeated in the primary. WPA workers were sent letters from the “DUFFY FOR SENATE CLUB,” and they responded with contributions. Stafford alleged that

⁹⁶ *Tribune* (Chicago, Illinois), May 28, 1939.

⁹⁷ “Candidates in Closing Drive to Line Up Vote,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 3, 1938.

⁹⁸ “Help for State Agriculture Is Told by Duffy,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 1, 1938.

⁹⁹ “Duffy Replies to Charges by G.O.P. Officer,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 1, 1938.

¹⁰⁰ “Franked Cards for Duffy are Legal, Ruling,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 3, 1938.

Duffy violated federal law by soliciting campaign funds from federal employees. The charges were brought before a senatorial campaign fund investigating committee in Washington, D.C. The committee ruled there was no evidence that Senator Duffy had any personal knowledge of the letters and ruled, after the election was completed, that the former U.S. Senator did not violate federal law.¹⁰¹ Despite his personal exoneration, these charges also might have had some negative impact during the campaign.

A more serious issue concerned Duffy's voting record on veterans' affairs. In 1932, Duffy had run on a platform of support for veterans, but he subsequently voted against veterans' economic interests by voting for the governmental economy bill that slashed veterans' compensation, including the long-promised "bonus." In an appearance at the State American Legion convention held in Janesville in August 1933, Duffy defended his position:

My years of effort in behalf of the service man naturally caused me to have a great interest in any veteran legislation proposed. [However,] . . . the affairs of the nation were desperate . . . the welfare of the veteran was at stake, but also all the people of our nation. A drastic cut in the cost of operating the government was essential.¹⁰²

Duffy was not afraid to make a tough decision and held to the promise he had made in Neenah, that he would "vote upon [issues] as I see their merit." While some might have judged Duffy's action as a vote against the veterans, others probably agreed with him that his decision was a vote for all Americans.

His vote against the Bonus bill probably was not as significant a factor in the outcome of the election as was the emergence of the Progressives as a separate political force. But, regardless of the cost to him personally, he cast his vote for what he saw as the good of the nation, not just for a special interest group, no matter how close it was to him. In the Senate, Duffy had grown from his initial political role as advocate for veterans' groups. His appearance before the State Legion convention showed that he was not afraid to vote his conscience and was willing to defend it, regardless of the cost to him politically. His actions showed the strength of his character, even though they probably cost him politically.

In fact, Duffy was not alone in his defeat, for the 1938 election was a Wisconsin Republican landslide. Another Fond du Lac resident, Democratic U.S. Representative Michael K. Reilly, was also defeated. Reilly had served in Congress from 1913 to 1917 and later had been

¹⁰¹ "Campaign Quiz Clear Duffy," *Milwaukee Journal*, January 3, 1939.

¹⁰² "Veterans' Compensation Vote is Defended by Senator Duffy," *Sheboygan Press*, August 22, 1933.

elected to fill the unexpired term of deceased Congressman Florian Lampert. The Progressive Governor, Philip La Follette, was also denied a fourth term, as he was defeated by Republican Julius P. Heil, a Milwaukee industrialist. The Republicans won all the major state offices and eight of ten congressional seats.¹⁰³ It thus appears that a combination of factors in Wisconsin politics at large led to Duffy's defeat rather than any issue related to his individual candidacy.

Following his defeat, Duffy briefly returned to his law practice with Russell E. Hanson in Fond du Lac. In June 1939, he was appointed by President Roosevelt as United States District Judge for the Eastern District of Wisconsin in Milwaukee (the District Court hears most federal cases and ranks below the Court of Appeals), replacing Ferdinand A. Geiger, who had served on the bench for twenty-seven years.¹⁰⁴ As a result, the Duffy family made plans to relocate to Milwaukee and purchased a home on Hackett Street. The law firm of Duffy, Duffy and Hanson was dissolved.¹⁰⁵ F. Ryan Duffy began another phase of his career, as a judge. In 1949, President Truman elevated Duffy to the six-judge Court of Appeals for the Seventh Circuit—ranked next to the Supreme Court, the highest court in the land.

As a judge, Duffy dealt with many different cases, but one case that received much notoriety was the appeal of the infamous Teamster President James R. Hoffa, who argued that “excessive publicity prevented him from a fair trial [in Chicago] in 1964.”¹⁰⁶ On June 26, 1964, Hoffa was convicted of mail fraud and conspiracy involving the Teamsters Union's pension fund. Hoffa's June 1966 appeal to the U.S. Court of Appeals charged that the pretrial publicity had been unfair. Hoffa's Lawyer, Maurice J. Walsh, claimed that “widespread publicity about Hoffa's previous conviction for jury tampering in Tennessee and his feud with U.S. Attorney General Robert F. Kennedy made it impossible to select an unbiased jury.” He maintained that, in questioning the jurors, more than 100 were aware of the Kennedy-Hoffa feud. The rebuttal from the Justice Department contended that some of the publicity had been generated by Hoffa himself, and the jurors had not been aware of it because they were sequestered. Duffy and two Appeals judges, Lathan Castle and Luther Swygert, heard arguments for five hours from the six

¹⁰³ “Progressive Forces Swept from Office, Senator Duffy 3rd,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 9, 1938.

¹⁰⁴ “F. Ryan Duffy Confirmed as Federal Judge,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 27, 1939.

¹⁰⁵ “Judge Duffy to Move Family to Milwaukee,” *Appleton Post Crescent*, June 28, 1939.

¹⁰⁶ “Bad Publicity City in Hoffa Case,” *Milwaukee Journal*, June 16, 1966.

defense lawyers. Duffy said, “It was the most [arguments] he recall[ed] in 17 years on the appeals bench.”¹⁰⁷

The then seventy-eight-year old Judge Duffy wrote the majority opinion on October 4, 1966, with Judge Castle in agreement. Duffy “rejected the defense’s contention that publicity prejudiced Hoffa’s chance for a fair trial,” stating “Whenever any person of prominence is charged with a crime, the story usually will receive wide distribution through various news media. The fact that a juror may have read or heard accounts relative to a criminal charge is alone not sufficient ground for excusing a prospective juror.”¹⁰⁸ Judge Swygert wrote a dissenting opinion that in part said, “every defendant in a criminal case is entitled to the fundamentals of a fair trial, free of the prejudicial errors that occurred in this case.”¹⁰⁹

Duffy became a chief judge in 1954 and served until 1959, assigning tasks to the other judges within his jurisdiction.¹¹⁰ He semi-retired from the court in 1966, assuming the status of senior judge. Duffy continued to hear cases on a part-time basis for several more years and fully retired in 1978.¹¹¹

Duffy’s last public appearance in Fond du Lac may have occurred on March 12, 1974, when he presented the Public Library with an autographed painting of former President Harry Truman, bearing the inscription, “To my good friend, Ryan Duffy, senator, federal district judge, judge of the court of appeals, with kindest regards and happy memories of our association. Independence, Mo., July 1, 1957.”¹¹²

Duffy died at the age of 91 on August 16, 1979, only a year after he retired and stopped going to his office. He was returned to his native Fond du Lac and buried in Calvary Cemetery, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.¹¹³ The Trier Puddy Post 75 American Legion firing squad offered a final salute.¹¹⁴ Reverend James Duffy presided at the burial service for his father, saying, “He always considered Fond du Lac his true home. Even when we lived in Washington, we came back here to home. When he was a federal judge, we came back here. This was and is his home.

¹⁰⁷ “Publicity Made Hoffa Trial Unfair, Says Lawyer,” *Chicago Daily News*, June 15, 1966.

¹⁰⁸ “Hoffa Loses Appeal on Fraud Conviction,” *Milwaukee Journal*, October 5, 1966.

¹⁰⁹ “Court Upholds Conviction of Hoffa, 6 Others,” *Milwaukee Sentinel*, October 5, 1966.

¹¹⁰ “Judge R. Ryan Duffy Steps Down From His Appeals Court Post,” *Appleton Post Crescent*, August 8, 1959.

¹¹¹ Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989, Bicentennial Edition, 1989, 934.

¹¹² “A True Fond du Lac-er!” William A. Draves, unpublished manuscript, April 11, 1988.

¹¹³ Biographical Directory of the United States Congress 1774-1989. Bicentennial Edition, 934.

¹¹⁴ “Famed City son F. Ryan Duffy dies at age 91,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, August, 1979.

In returning his remains to Fond du Lac, we are coming home.”¹¹⁵ The man, who had walked with the famous, had judged the infamous and had many friends among the not-so-famous, the man who is perhaps Fond du Lac’s most famous political favorite son, was home again.

¹¹⁵ “F. Ryan Duffy in final trip home,” *Fond du Lac Reporter*, Thomas Guenther, August 21, 1979.

The Brothertown Indians and American Indian Policy

Jason S. Walter

In 1982, the Brothertown Nation commemorated the 150th Anniversary of the Treaty of 1832, which had granted the Brothertown Indians a home in Wisconsin. The Wisconsin State Legislature formally congratulated the Brothertown Indians on their 150th Anniversary under joint Rule 7, which stated:

The members of the Wisconsin Legislature, on the motion from Representative Hephner and Senator Hanaway, under joint Rule 7, congratulate the Brothertown Indians on their 150th Anniversary celebration in Wisconsin: commend them on the numerous contributions made by their people to the State of Wisconsin: commend the courageous men who fought, from the Revolution to the present, and earned respect and dignity for the Brothertown Tribe; and wish the Brothertown Indians continued success in bringing to the public's attention the important role they play in history.¹

Though the State of Wisconsin recognizes the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin as a distinct Indian tribe, the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin are one of about 250 tribes and Indian communities that are not recognized by the federal government.² Nevertheless, the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin have kept their customs and traditions alive. For example, they gather at annual homecoming, reunions, funerals, weddings, and picnics.³ Moreover, the Brothertown Indians have a functioning tribal government. As of 2001, the tribe is optimistic that their application for federal recognition and acknowledgment will be accepted by the United States government, an action which they believe will reinvigorate the once federally recognized tribal government.⁴

The federal government, on highly questionable and controversial grounds, has denied the Brothertown Indians federal recognition as a distinct Indian tribe since 1839. This position is difficult to sustain, in view of the Brothertown group's ancestry, common culture, and social identity.⁵ In 1834, the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin demanded individual titles to their lands, which were owned communally by the tribe. In 1837, the Brothertown Indians again requested that their

¹ State of Wisconsin Citation By The Legislature.

² Olivia N. and Phillip G. Tousey, "Historical Sketch: The Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin" (unpublished manuscript, Marian College Archives), 2.

³ Will Ottery and Rudi Ottery, *A Man Called Sampson, 1580-1989* (Maine: Penobscot Press, 1989), 53; Olivia and Phillip Tousey, 9. See also: "June Quarterly Report Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin," Annual Homecoming Picnic July 15, 1995 sign-up sheet (Marian College Archives).

⁴ Jack Campisi, *The Brothertown Indian Nation of Wisconsin: A Brief History* (The Brothertown Indian Nation, 1991), 3-4. This history was submitted by the Tribal Council to the Department of Public Instruction for school use.

⁵ Olivia and Phillip Tousey, 2.

land titles be held individually, along with petitioning for citizenship.⁶ These requests for citizenship were logical and calculated because Brothertown leaders believed that by acquiring citizenship the tribe could not be forced to move west, as was common after the passage of the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

On March 3, 1839, Congress granted the Brothertown Indians full United States citizenship and divided their lands into separate entities, which were individually owned.⁷ Perhaps the United States Congress was agreeable to the request for citizenship because such a request was consistent with the government's American Indian policy during the 19th century. There is little doubt that the federal government wanted American Indian tribes to assimilate into American society and culture. Furthermore, Congress understood that providing the Brothertown Indians with citizenship would ultimately end the federal government's responsibilities to the tribe.

Unfortunately, citizenship was only a short-term victory. While the Brothertown Indians did indeed succeed in maintaining their residence in Wisconsin by acquiring United States citizenship, that same citizenship meant they ultimately relinquished their sovereign nation status and associated rights. Nevertheless, the tribe felt they had not lost the power to govern themselves and continued to do so until the Civil War.⁸ In fact, the Brothertown Indians believed the benefits of citizenship would be an addition to the rights, privileges, and protection to which their tribal status entitled them.⁹ However, during the 1870s, as was common throughout the United States due to the passage of the Dawes Act (General Allotment Act), non-Indians began buying huge portions of Indian lands. The Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin had already experienced the devastating consequences of non-Indians buying their lands near fifty years earlier. Although the tribal council still met and made decisions for the tribe as a whole, the Brothertown lands on Lake Winnebago continued to fall into non-Indian hands.

These events illustrate how the Brothertown Indians have been directly and indirectly affected by federal government policies and decisions. The tribal group is a small regional example of the much larger national pattern of how federal government policies resulted in loss of tribal government and the division of tribal lands. Without question, the federal government's policies,

⁶ Brothertown Indians, "The Brothertown Indians: Samson Ocom" (Brothertown Indians Internet Homepage), available on the Internet: www.jps.net/herblst/indians.htm. See also: Indian Country Wisconsin, "Brothertown History: Citizenship," available on the Internet: <http://192.206.48.3/wirp/ICW-157.html>.

⁷ Moses M. Strong, *History of the Territory of Wisconsin From 1836 to 1848* (Madison: Democrat Printing Co., 1885), 115. Lyman P. Fowler, *In the matter of the Brothertown Indians of the State of Wisconsin: before the 44th Congress*. (Washington), 1876, (Pamphlet, State Historical Society of Wisconsin 56-1614).

⁸ Campisi, 4-5.

⁹ Olivia and Phillip Tousey, 2.

such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830 and the Allotment Act of 1887, had an impact on the Brothertown Indians' decision to request citizenship, which ultimately resulted in the detribalization action.

Eventually, the federal government granted citizenship to all Indians while allowing them to retain their sovereignty and tribal governments; however, that decision did not change the federal recognition status for the Brothertown Indians. Consequently, the tribe have been trying to reestablish their relationship with the federal government through a variety of different means. In 1978, the Department of the Interior established regulations for the acknowledgment of tribes, and this resulted in increased interest among the tribal members. The Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin began to research their tribal history in order to satisfy the criteria for federal recognition. In 1996, this research culminated in a petition for federal acknowledgment of their status as a tribe. The tribe is currently fourth on the list of petitions awaiting review.¹⁰

The Brothertown Indians are an amalgamation of Christian Indian groups from the New England and Long Island, New York areas. The conversion to Christianity of various Indian groups was in part the result of the Great Awakening, a religious movement in New England during the 1740s.¹¹ During this time period, the New England tribes found it increasingly difficult to function, due to pressure to give up farming and sell their lands. Consequently, over a number of years, plans were made to migrate to Oneida County, New York. These plans were essentially the idea of Samson Occom, a Mohegan, who urged the tribes to band together and move west to an area where they would be under less pressure from whites.¹²

The general idea behind migration was to improve the conditions of the New England tribes, especially to alleviate the pressure to give up farming and to sell their lands. Samson Occom believed that it was necessary for the tribes to hold land that could not be alienated. Besides their problems with land, the tribes were also confronted with an array of social, economic, and

¹⁰ "Brothertown celebration raises \$6,800," *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, August 4, 2000.

¹¹ James P. Ronda, "Reverend Samuel Kirkland and the Oneida Indians," in *The Oneida Indian Experience: Two Perspectives*, ed. Jack Campisi and Laurence M. Hauptman (Syracuse University Press, 1988), 25-26.

¹² Duane Champagne, *Native America: Portrait of the Peoples* (Washington, D.C.: Visible Ink Press, 1994), 82-83. Samson Occom became a Christian convert at the age of eighteen. Through his life he devoted himself to teaching and converting Indians to Christianity. Occom was the first student of Eleazar Wheelock a Christian missionary who had been teaching Indians since 1743. However, Occom split with Wheelock over the emphasis and focus of their mission. Occom wanted to minister to Indians directly, while Wheelock wanted to train Indian missionaries. Consequently, Occom became a minister and teacher in an Algonkian-speaking community of Indian people in eastern New York called Brotherton. Occom tried to relocate his followers after encroachment by New York settlers.

leadership problems. Finally, there was a clear need for larger and better lands for agriculture, along with an improved environment to practice Christianity.¹³

Thus, the Brothertown Indians became a distinct tribe when seven Christian communities organized and migrated to land granted to them by the Oneida Indians in 1774. The seven communities associated with the move west included the Pequots at Groton, the Pequots at Stonington, the Mohegans, the Montauks, the Eastern and Western Niantics, the Farmington or Tunxis Indians, and the Narragansett Indians. The migration of the seven tribes was carried out under the leadership of Samson Occom and Joseph Johnson (Occom's son-in-law). Both Occom and Johnson were familiar with upstate New York, and they were determined to lead their people, along with other New England Indians, to a home where they could live in peace and lead Christian lives.¹⁴

After the completion of negotiations with the Oneida tribe in the spring of 1774, the first group of Brothertown Indians (those who could endure hardship) went to New York. Upon arrival, the Brothertown immediately built log huts, started gardens, and planted cornfields. Moreover, barns were built, fields were enclosed, and various kinds of livestock were introduced.¹⁵ Even though old tribal relations were broken by the migration, the hereditary tribal customs continued through the establishment of a new tribal government. The newly organized tribal government was modeled after Connecticut town government. The new town was named Brothertown because, as Christians, they wanted to live in Brotherhood.¹⁶ Before the rest of the tribe could join these early migrants, the American Revolutionary War began, and the Brothertown Indians quickly moved to support the Colonial cause. Due to dangers from raiding groups of pro-British Indians during the Revolutionary War, the Brothertown Indians, along with most of the white settlers in the area, were not able to return to their land until after the 1783 Treaty of Paris.¹⁷

At the end of the War, the Brothertown Indians returned to clear their land and to establish a new homeland. However, in 1792, the tribe suffered a tremendous loss due to the death of Samson Occom. After Occom's death, the Brothertown Indians fell prey to religious factionalism. Furthermore, the Indians were beginning to see the devastating effects of land leasing, which led to

¹³ William DeLoss Love, *Samson Occom and the Christian Indians of New England* (Syracuse, New York: Syracuse University Press, 2000), 207-208.

¹⁴ Laura E. Conkey, Ethel Boissevain, and Ives Goddard, "Indians of Southern New England and Long Island: Late Period," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, v. 15, William C. Sturtevant and Bruce G. Trigger, eds., (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 181-182.

¹⁵ Thomas Commuck, "Sketch of the Brothertown Indians," *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* v. IV, ed. Lyman Copeland Draper (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1906), 298; Love, 225-230.

¹⁶ Love, 208-209.

¹⁷ Will and Rudi Ottery, 45.

further pressure on the group to sell their land and move west again.¹⁸ By the early 1800s, the Brothertown Indians were looking for yet another place to settle.

In 1816, Eleazar Williams, an Episcopal missionary, commenced preaching among the Oneidas, and he articulated his dream of establishing an Indian empire in the West. By 1823, Williams and representatives of the Oneidas had secured joint occupation of some 4,000,000 acres of land from the Menominees and Winnebagos in what would become Wisconsin.¹⁹ The negotiations between the New York tribes and the Menominee and Winnebago Indians constitute a complex and confusing story, yet it is clear that the Brothertown Indians joined in the plans to move to Wisconsin by purchasing 23,040 acres along the Fox River. However, before the Brothertown Indians could move, the federal government negotiated an exchange of this tract for an equal amount of land situated along Lake Winnebago in present-day Calumet County.²⁰

The Brothertown Indians began their migration to these new lands in 1831. A majority of the tribe had arrived by 1837.²¹ The group of Brothertown Indians who migrated to the nascent Wisconsin Territory possessed considerable advantages, for they had experience and knowledge of government and the means necessary for a good start in a new community. Furthermore, although the distance from New York to Wisconsin was too great for them to transport all their belongings, the Erie Canal from Utica to Buffalo, completed in 1825, allowed the travelers to reach Green Bay by boat along the Great Lakes.²²

The tribe's move westward to Wisconsin took place during the time period following passage by the United States government of the Indian Removal Act of 1830. However, the Act itself did not directly force the Brothertown Indians to move to Wisconsin in the same way that it produced other great tragedies and loss of human life, such as the Cherokee migration, often described as "The Trail of Tears." Yet the Removal Act of 1830 was directly related to a major decision that the Brothertown Indians subsequently made, one that had devastating unforeseen consequences for them.

¹⁸ Love, 290-298.

¹⁹ Jack Campisi, "Oneida," in *Handbook of North American Indians: Northeast*, v. 15, ed. William C. Sturtevant and Bruce G. Trigger (Washington: Smithsonian Institution, 1978), 485.

²⁰ The Brothertown Indians. available on the Internet at www.jps.net/herblst/indians.htm.

²¹ Campisi, 4. See also: William A. Draves, "Descendants of Brothertown Indians Hope to Share in 1.3 Million Grant," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 21, 1967, 3, 14.

²² Love, 324-326.

The Indian Removal Act of 1830 effectively evicted the major Indian tribes from land east of the Mississippi and moved them to “Indian Territory” in the West.²³ In theory, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was a voluntary exchange of eastern lands for western lands; however, the reality of the situation often led to Indians being coerced or tricked into making the exchange. A tactic often used by federal government officials was to secure an agreement with some Indian leader whom the government claimed spoke for the tribe, make the exchange agreement, and then declare that the negotiated exchange was binding on all members of the tribe, regardless whether they were even aware that the arrangement had taken place. After an agreement was concluded, the government claimed the right to move all the Indians said to be included in the exchange, by force if necessary.

The seeds of Indian removal were planted during the presidency of Thomas Jefferson. In 1803, Jefferson suggested to Congress the possibility of removal of the Eastern Indian tribes, and he succeeded in incorporating a provision for exchange of Indian lands in the act that organized the Louisiana Territory in 1804.²⁴ The removal of Indians to a western “Indian Country” was based on the philosophy that there existed sufficient land and satisfactory resources for all people within that vast territory, and that separation of Indians from non-Indians would prevent conflict between the groups.²⁵ However, while the lands ceded to Indians were sparsely settled, if at all, at that time, and though the lands seemed to have no value, it was not long before settlers pushed westward into these new Indian lands, producing fresh conflict and demands for further removals of Indians.

So even though the Brothertown Indians’ move to Wisconsin cannot be traced directly to action resulting from the Indian Removal Act of 1830, there probably was a connection. Perhaps the group believed it was best to move while they could do so under their own terms and to negotiate their own migration westward, rather than allow the federal government to dictate their removal. Therefore, one might argue that the Indian Removal Act of 1830 indirectly caused the Brothertown Indians’ relocation to Wisconsin, because they reached the conclusion that removal from their New York lands was inevitable, given the political and social climate of the early 1800s. Still, there is also significant evidence that the Indians were themselves looking for a place to move. The possibility of a move to the Ohio Valley, to land held by the Delaware tribe, was discussed, but

²³ Lyman Tyler, *A History of Indian Policy* (Washington: United States Department of the Interior, 1973), 56-59. The Indian Removal Act of May 28, 1830 was originally entitled: “An Act to Provide for an Exchange of Lands with the Indians Residing in Any of the States or Territories, and for Their Removal West of the River Mississippi.”

²⁴ Theda Perdue and Michael Green, *The Cherokee Removal: A Brief History with Documents* (Boston: Bedford Books, 1995), 221-222.

²⁵ Theodore W. Taylor, *The Bureau of Indian Affairs* (Westview Press, 1984), 10.

those plans never materialized.²⁶ In 1821, a delegation of tribal representatives from the Brothertown, Stockbridge, and Oneida groups traveled to Green Bay, Wisconsin and negotiated the purchase of 860,000 acres.²⁷ But whether or not the Indian Removal Act of 1830 was the indirect cause of the Brothertown relocation to Wisconsin, the Act ultimately had serious and long lasting effects on the Brothertown Indians once they arrived in Wisconsin.

A Treaty of October 27, 1832, resulted in the establishment of the Brothertown reservation on the east side of Lake Winnebago in what is now Calumet County. Specifically, the reservation granted to the Brothertown Indians extended four miles north and south of Lake Winnebago and extended eight miles from east to west.²⁸ But the Brothertown Indians had hardly settled in the new Wisconsin Territory when a new threat appeared. The federal government entered into negotiations with tribes in New York and Wisconsin to exchange their lands for land in the Indian Territory of Kansas.²⁹ On January 15, 1838, the United States and the tribes concluded the Treaty of Buffalo Creek.³⁰ As a result, the Brothertown Indians were again in danger of being forced to move west. The Treaty of Buffalo Creek is a clear example of the consequences of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, for the objectives of the Treaty of Buffalo Creek were the same as those of the Act.

The immediate problem for the Brothertowns was how to hold on to their land in Wisconsin. Among most American Indian tribes, it was customary to hold land in common rather than vested in individual ownership. Unfortunately, this practice subjected their lands to government actions, such as the Treaty of Buffalo Creek. Hence, the Brothertown Indians concluded that, if they held title to land individually, as non-Indians did, then their lands would be protected. This appears to be the major reason that the Brothertown Indians requested citizenship and “severalty,” or division of all tribal lands among the members of the tribe.³¹

On March 3, 1839, the United States Congress passed legislation dividing the Brothertown tribal lands in severalty and making the tribal members United States citizens. However, by granting the Brothertown Indians citizenship, the Congress found it necessary to remove from the tribe the power to make laws to govern the same land. The basis for such a decision came in part from

²⁶ Love, 316-319.

²⁷ Albert G. Ellis, “Advent of the New York Indians into Wisconsin,” in *Collections of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin* v. II, ed. Lyman Copeland Draper (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1903), 417.

²⁸ Charles J. Kappler ed., *Indian Affairs: Laws and Treaties* v. II (Treaties) (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1904), 377-382.

²⁹ Ellis, 445.

³⁰ Kappler, 502-516. (7 Stat., 550). Proclamation occurred on April 4, 1840. In 1838, the United States negotiated a treaty with the New York tribes whereby they were to exchange their claims in Wisconsin for land in the Kansas Territory.

³¹ Campisi, 4-5.

previous United States Supreme Court cases. For example, *Worester v. Georgia* (1832) established that the Cherokee Nation was “a distinct community, occupying its own territory” in which “the laws of Georgia can have no force.”³² This Supreme Court case was one of the most important in the history of United States–Indian relations, establishing the sovereignty of tribes. Because Congress intended to assure that, in the governance of the Brothertown Indian lands, Territorial and, later, State law would be enforced, Congress found it necessary to remove from the tribe the power to make laws to govern tribal land after citizenship was granted.

Consequently, the Indian Removal Act of 1830 had an unusual effect on the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin. While the objective of the Act had been to move Indian tribes that occupied land east of the Mississippi further to the west, the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin had already moved west twice, albeit still east of the Mississippi. Yet by 1838, the federal government was trying to move them to lands further west, in Kansas. The Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin, realizing that citizenship would block their removal from their location along Lake Winnebago, decided to accept citizenship, but in doing so they inadvertently gave up their tribal status. However, it is important to note that the Brothertown Indians themselves believed the benefits of citizenship would be enjoyed in addition to the rights, privileges, and protection afforded by their tribal status.³³

Land patents were issued to Brothertown Indians in 1845, pursuant to the 1839 Act of Congress. Tribal leaders continued to govern the tribe in much the same manner as they had before the Act granting them citizenship was passed.³⁴ During their early years in Wisconsin, the Brothertown Indians made encouraging progress in agriculture, establishing functioning farms. Furthermore, the Brothertown Indians helped erect some of the first structures in Fond du Lac County, and they also built the first gristmill in the area, an essential to frontier life.³⁵ Brothertown Indians helped Colwert K. Pier and Fanna Pier, often cited by local historians as the “first settlers” in the area, to build their first home in Fond du Lac County.³⁶

Calumet County, in which the Brothertown Indians lived, was formed in 1840, a year after the Brothertown Indians received citizenship. Without question, the Brothertown Indians were

³² Angie Debo, *A History of the Indians of the United States* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1970), 105-106. See also *Worester v. Georgia* (1832), 31 U.S. 515 (1832), available on the Internet at www.judicare.org/sct.html.

³³ Olivia and Phillip Tousey, 1.

³⁴ Campisi, 5.

³⁵ A. J. Andrew, *History of Northern Wisconsin: An account of its settlement, growth, development, and resources, and extensive sketch of its countries, cities towns and villages* (Chicago: The Western Historical Company, 1881), 172-173. See also Olivia and Phillip Tousey, 7.

³⁶ Maureen Betz and John Ebert, *Fond du Lac County: The Gathering Place* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, 1999), 35.

involved and active in the establishment of this County. For example, the first elections within the County were held in one of their homes. Furthermore, one Brothertown Indian was the first post-master in Calumet County, two were justices of the peace who performed marriages, and three served as members of Wisconsin's legislature. However, before long, their county organization gave way to one in which white settlers dominated, most of them of German origin.³⁷

By 1861, when the American Civil War began, non-Indians were buying up Brothertown land, due largely to the Brothertown Indians being forced to sell their land to pay the taxes that were now required of them. White settlers were also beginning to buy land surrounding the Brothertown Indians' former reservation. Consequently, by the 1870s, much of the land had been lost to non-Indians, and many tribal members were living on other reservations, working as tenants on other people's farms, or else living in one of the cities in the Lake Winnebago area.³⁸ Nevertheless, the tribe continued to act on behalf of its members. For example, it petitioned the Congress for permission to clear the title to some remaining lands on the frontier reservation and joined in a lawsuit against the United States over the land it and other New York tribes claimed in Kansas. This case was eventually won, and the tribes involved (including the Brothertown) received a per capita payment.³⁹ Clearly, this illustrates that, despite the loss of their land, the tribe continued various activities to further the interests of its members.

Furthermore, Congress recognized the continued existence of the tribe in several pieces of legislation.⁴⁰ This history of post-1839 recognition is of particular importance to the Brothertown Indians, who currently seek to regain federal recognition of their tribal status. Perhaps the most explicit example of continued recognition occurred in 1878, when Congress passed legislation providing for the sale of some previously unallocated Brothertown Indian land. As part of the legislation, Congress authorized five trustees, "members of the Brothertown tribe," to take "in trust for the Brothertown Indians" the land patents in question. But Congress specified that the trustees

³⁷ Love, 328-329.

³⁸ Campisi, 5.

³⁹ Love, 321-323.

⁴⁰ Olivia and Phillip Tousey cite other specific instances in which the Brothertown Indians have been recognized by the U. S. government subsequent to the 1839 citizenship act. By an Act of Congress, funds were granted to the Brothertown Indians for Kansas land they had never received (1898); in arguments in the Fowler v. Scott case before the Wisconsin Supreme Court (1885); and in special Indian population enumerations including the Brothertown Indians (1900 and 1910).

could not dispose of the land without tribal permission, and specifically laid out the terms by which the tribal government must participate to permit legal sale.⁴¹

Provided, however, that said lands or any part thereof, shall be sold by the said trustees whenever a majority of the said Brothertown Tribe shall petition for the same And the said trustees shall distribute and pay over the proceeds arising from such sale or sales to the Brothertown Indians, according to the formers usages, customs, and regulations of said tribe.⁴²

Thus Congress explicitly recognized the continued existence of the Brothertown tribe, acknowledged its leadership, and accepted as valid the tribe's rules and regulations. It is also clear that the government understood that the tribe was functioning, since the law required a majority of its members to approve any sale.⁴³

In 1887, the federal government established a new policy affecting Indian tribes, the Dawes Act (General Allotment Act).⁴⁴ The Dawes Act was a nationwide change that dealt primarily with the ownership of land by breaking down tribal lands into small property units. Each of these property units of 40 to 160 acres was given to an individual Indian.⁴⁵ Land that remained after all of eligible Indians had received their shares was sold to whites. Consequently, the Dawes Act resulted in increased alienation of land holdings to non-Indians. The Dawes Act also provided for Indian citizenship. Every Indian born in the United States to whom an allotment was made, or any Indian who had voluntarily taken up residence apart from his tribe and adopted habits of "civilized life," was declared by the Act to be a citizen of the United States, without impairing the rights he/she might have to tribal or other property.⁴⁶

The Dawes Act is still the subject of scholarly debate in terms of its intent. Most scholars believe that the legislation was an attempt to force assimilation of Indians into white society and to end their tradition of communal ownership of land. There is little question that this position was taken by members of the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Secretary of the Interior. However, some believe that the Act was a response to the claim that Indians owned too much land and that this land was underutilized. The allotment policy would make more land available to white farmers and

⁴¹ Campisi, 5-6. See also Pages 76-77 in Letter from Research Associates, Rd. #2 Box 492 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571, to June Ezold, October 17, 1985 (Marian College Archives).

⁴² Kappler, 173-173. (20 Stat., 513) Proclamation occurred on April 20, 1878.

⁴³ Page 77, Letter from Research Associates, Rd. #2 Box 492 Red Hook, N.Y. 12571, to June Ezold, October 17, 1985. (Marian College Archives).

⁴⁴ Francis Paul Prucha, *American Indian Policy in Crisis: Christian Reformers and the Indian, 1865-1900* (University of Oklahoma Press, 1976), 252-253.

⁴⁵ *United States Statues at Large* 24:388-391. See also United States Department of Interior "Bureau of Indian Affairs" 24 Stat. 388 available at www.doi.gov/bia/cla/clalwas.htm.

⁴⁶ Prucha, 252-253.

force the Indians into farming.⁴⁷ Regardless of the original intent, both of these goals seem to have been achieved by the legislation. Yet a third view of the Dawes Act has been that it was intended as a reform to protect Indian lands from encroaching white settlers. Some scholars have viewed the Dawes Act as a beginning of a new policy that allowed Indians to assume an active role to the economic system. In general, this was the viewpoint of The Indian Rights Association in 1887.⁴⁸

The Dawes Act also allowed the United States to acquire the remaining lands on reservations, once individual distributions had been made, and to open them to white settlement. The expectation was that Indians would be able to farm their individual allotments. If the intent of the Act was to encourage Indians to become farmers, it was not very successful, for many Indians had no knowledge of farming, and others had no interest in this occupation. As a result, many Indians sold their lands and lived off the money they received. Once this money ran out, they had no further means of support. The result was a further downward economic spiral for many Indians.

The Brothertown Indians were not directly affected by the provisions of the Dawes Act, since they had already been granted citizenship and their tribal lands already had been broken up, but they experienced the same devastating sequence of events as other Indian tribes. Indeed, the Brothertown Indians simply experienced these traumatic changes prior to many other tribes. By the 1870s, much of the Brothertown Indians' land had already been lost to non-Indians, and the neighboring Stockbridge Indians were beginning to experience similar land loss.⁴⁹ Stockbridge Indians who needed cash sold their allotments to business dealers who coveted the forested lands for lumbering. Other Stockbridge Indians lost their allotments because of failure to meet tax or loan payments.⁵⁰ Thus, as had been the case for the Brothertown Indians, the Stockbridge Indians began to see their reservation land disappear.⁵¹ Even though ex-Governor James Doty, in 1851, hailed the positive results of the grant of citizenship to the Brothertown Indians, the reality of the situation was that the Brothertown Indians, like other Indians throughout the country, were selling their lands to meet bills for taxes and necessities.⁵²

⁴⁷ Stephen J. Herzberg, "The Menominee Indians: From Treaty to Termination," *Wisconsin Magazine of History* v. 60, 4 Summer, (1977): 279-280; Tyler, 95-97.

⁴⁸ Prucha, 227-228; Tyler, 95-97.

⁴⁹ Mohican Nation: Stockbridge-Munsee Band, "Reservation: people of the waters that are never still" (Mohican Nation Stockbridge-Munsee Band, 1997). Available on Internet at: www.mohican.com/history/res.htm.

⁵⁰ Joyce M. Erdman, *Governor's Commission on Human Rights: Handbook on Wisconsin Indians* (Madison: State of Wisconsin, 1966), 35.

⁵¹ Nancy Oestreich Lurie, *Wisconsin Indians* (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1987), 24.

⁵² Robert C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin*, v. III: *Urbanization & Industrialization 1873-1893* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1985), 423.

By the 1900s, over half of the Brothertown Indians no longer lived in Calumet County. In general, the Brothertown Indians left Calumet County because the original land allotments apportioned to support each family unit had become insufficient, once children and grandchildren were grown and a single allotment was required to support the large families of several generations. Brothertown Indians who had married into Stockbridge, Oneida, or other tribal lines increasingly made their homes on those reservations.⁵³ Those Brothertown Indians living with other tribes experienced a sharp decline in their standard of living as the Dawes Act affected those tribes.

In addition to the land problem, the Brothertown Indian had difficulties finding jobs, due to a lack of employment opportunities in Calumet County and on the reservations. Many moved to places where they could find jobs, including Fond du Lac, Oshkosh, Milwaukee, Sheboygan, Green Bay and other neighboring communities. A significant number of Brothertown Indians moved further west to Minnesota, Kansas, Nebraska, and the Dakotas.⁵⁴ Lack of employment opportunities made it virtually impossible for the Brothertown Indians to continue to exist as a tribal group.

One objective of American Indian policy in the nineteenth century was clearly to force individual Indians into something resembling citizenship. As a result of these policies, Indian tribes throughout the country often gained citizenship at the expense of loss of tribal recognition and reservation lands.⁵⁵ Indian landownership dramatically fell from 155,632,319 acres in 1881 to 77,865,373 acres in 1900.⁵⁶ To stop further loss of reservation lands, the federal government passed the Indian Reorganization Act of 1934. This act encouraged reservation Indians to take a more active role in managing their own affairs. It also provided for limited self-government through councils elected by the tribe.⁵⁷

By 1940, the Brothertown Indians found themselves an impoverished underclass, buried in poverty and scattered around the State of Wisconsin and beyond, a condition they shared with tribes like the Oneida and Stockbridge.⁵⁸ However, unlike the Brothertown Indians, the Stockbridge and Oneida Indians were able to obtain funds from the federal government to reorganize their tribal government and regain some of the land that had been lost. About 15,000 acres of land in the

⁵³ Commuck, 298; Love, 329.

⁵⁴ Love, 329.

⁵⁵ Nesbit, 419-420.

⁵⁶ Prucha, 257.

⁵⁷ Peter Nabokow, ed., *Native American Testimony: A Chronicle of Indian-White Relations from Prophecy to the Present, 1492-1992* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 306-308; Tyler, 131-132.

⁵⁸ Campisi, 6.

Wisconsin township of Bartelme were purchased through a federal program for use by members of the Stockbridge Indian tribe.⁵⁹

Unfortunately, it had been determined that the Brothertown Indians were not eligible for such federal assistance, since they had not been directly affected by the Dawes Act. Nevertheless, throughout the first four decades of the twentieth century the Brothertown Indians continued to keep alive their traditions by participating in a variety of community activities. Most of these activities ended during World War II, because many Brothertown Indians entered military service or moved to more distant cities to work in defense plants. At the conclusion of World War II, many Brothertown Indians remained in the cities or moved to new locations as the defense industries shifted to peacetime production. Only a few returned to the Fond du Lac–Brothertown area, and those who did suffered from lack of employment. Despite this scattering, many tribal members maintained contact with each other throughout the postwar period.⁶⁰

In 1978, the federal government established yet another policy that directly affected the Wisconsin Brothertown Indians. Guidelines were established whereby Indian tribes could regain federal recognition that they had lost for various reasons. This acknowledgment process provided for federal recognition of Indian tribes and established eligibility to receive services provided to Indians.⁶¹ The purpose of the Federal acknowledgment regulations was to recognize that a government-to-government relationship existed between the United States and tribes that had existed since first European contact with non-Indians.⁶² The Brothertown Indians believed that they had a good case for recognition, since they could provide a current tribal roll established only ten years earlier. Unfortunately, according to the original regulations interpreting the legislation, tribes that had lost federal recognition through congressional legislation could not be reinstated. Based on this provision, the Brothertown Indians were denied federal recognition, because they had attained citizenship by means of an Act of Congress.⁶³ However, with the advent of the Federal Acknow-

⁵⁹ Mohican Nation: Stockbridge-Munsee Band. Also See: Erdman, 35.

⁶⁰ Campisi, 5-6.

⁶¹ “Procedures for Establishing that an American Indian Group Exists as an Indian Tribe.” The Federal Acknowledgment Project was originally entitled 25 CFR Part 54. The original regulations were redesignated as 25 CFR 83, and published in the *Federal Register*, v. 47, no. 61, pages 13326-13328, March 30, 1982. In 1994, the Federal acknowledgment regulations were revised and published by the *Federal Register*, v. 59, no. 38, pages 9280-9300, February 25, 1994. See also Bureau of Indian Affairs, Branch of Acknowledgment and Research Web Page at www.doi.gov/bia/bar/Indexr.htm.

⁶² Brothertown Indians, Available on the Internet: www.jps.net/herblst/indians.htm.

⁶³ Olivia and Phillip G. Tousey, 2.

ledgment Project, in 1980, the Brothertown Indians decided to apply for what is called “Federal Recognition.” The Brothertown Indians were the 67th tribe to apply for Federal Acknowledgment.⁶⁴

This federal policy stimulated renewed interest among the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin in that it focused attention on retribalization. The Brothertown Indians began researching their tribal history to satisfy the criteria for reestablishing the tribe’s relationship with the federal government.⁶⁵ In 1996, the Brothertown Indians of Wisconsin filed a petition for federal acknowledgment. As of August 4, 2000, the Brothertown Indians were number four on the “Active, Waiting to be Acknowledged” list.⁶⁶

The Brothertown Indians have maintained their tribal identity despite the massive economic, social, and political pressures on them. Forced to move repeatedly in order to preserve their way of life, the tribe received guarantees from the federal government, only to find that same government acting to strip the tribe of its land. In an attempt to preserve their land, the Brothertown Indians accepted citizenship and registered their land in severalty, but this action brought the loss of tribal status and stripped the tribe of its communal lands. There is little question that detribalization and division of tribal lands into allotments were the two great destroyers of the Brothertown Nation. Regaining tribal status has remained a fundamental objective of the Brothertown Indians for several decades. Although not yet recognized by the federal government, the Brothertown Indians continue as an operative tribe in Wisconsin, recognized by other Indian tribes and by the State of Wisconsin.

⁶⁴ June Ezold, e-mail correspondence with author, November 7-8, 2001.

⁶⁵ Ezold, e-mail correspondence with author.

⁶⁶ “Brothertown celebration raises \$6,800,” *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, August 4, 2000.

“Burial of Minnehaha,” 1887

Mark Robert Harrison

Oil on Canvas

Sternwheel Excursion Steamboat at Fond du Lac, before 1908

Down the Not-So-Lazy River: Commercial Steamboats in the Fox River Valley, 1843-1900

Timothy A. Casiana

On June 16, 1856, the residents of Wisconsin's Fox and Wolf River Valleys had plenty of reason to "gather at the river" and celebrate, and in Appleton, celebrate they did! A good part of Appleton's population of roughly 2,000 people had anxiously assembled along both shores of the Fox River. Among those gathered were a delegation of enthusiastic officials from the cities of Neenah and Menasha. It would have been obvious to even the most ignorant passer-by that something quite important was about to happen along the shores of the Upper Fox River.¹

On this day the 133-foot paddle steamer *Aquila* puffed up the Fox River to Appleton to meet the steamboat *Pioneer*. At approximately eleven o'clock, the *Aquila* chugged around the last point below the city into the view of the excited crowd. As the *Aquila* came into sight, the air was instantly filled with exuberant cheers and feverish applause from the animated assembly of flag-waving well-wishers. After a few moments the brass band on each vessel began to play triumphant music, accompanied by the sharp and steady polytonal shriek of steam-whistles. The editor of the *Appleton Crescent* described the celebrated meeting as "one of the most beautiful sights we have ever seen."

Although the sight of two steamers passing each other on the Fox had by this time become common, this meeting was still special, for the *Aquila* was the first steam vessel to make the trip by way of the Mississippi and Wisconsin Rivers, both of which were now linked to the Fox by the newly completed Portage Canal. This meeting symbolized the unification of America's northeastern water transportation system, stretching from the Atlantic Coast through the Great Lakes to the Mississippi-Missouri-Ohio River System. From the standpoint of national pride, the day was also special because two examples of one of America's first serious contributions to industrial technology, in the form of steam-powered waterborne transportation, were on display.

The day was also special for one participant, Captain Steven Hotaling. Captain Hotaling was the son of Peter Hotaling, the man who had brought this rapid and reliable means of com-

¹ *Appleton Crescent*, June 16, 1856.

mercial transportation to the region.² Peter Hotaling had established the precedent for Fox/Wolf River commercial steam navigation by bringing the first river steamer to Green Bay thirteen years earlier. For nearly a century after Captain Hotaling's steamer arrived, steam-powered waterborne transportation served as an important agent to economic progress and development in the Fox Valley.

From ice-out in mid-April until freeze-over in November, the chimney stacks of hard-working paddle steamers could be seen belching smoke on the Fox and Wolf anywhere from the northern docks of Fremont and Green Bay to the Portage Canal and beyond in the West, and to the shores of Lake Winnebago at Fond du Lac in the South. This was an era of commercial water navigation in which paddle steamers moved wood and wheat to milling centers, coal for industry, food from farm to market, and people from village to village.³

Long before the arrival of the *Aquila*, the foundation for steam-powered river transportation on Wisconsin's Fox and Wolf Rivers was established by the glacial topography of the region. The entire river basin runs parallel to an important land feature known as the Niagara escarpment. Several thousand years ago, glaciers moved into Wisconsin and channeled along the escarpment, thereby creating the Fox River.

The upper Fox River meanders on a gentle 107-mile course from Portage to Oshkosh. The Wolf River, which at one time extended commercial transportation as far as Shawano, flows southward through the north-central section of the State and joins the Fox via Lake Poygan and Lake Buttes des Morts. The upper Fox River is characterized by a network of narrows, shallows, and horseshoe bends. Conversely, the lower Fox is quite straight as it rushes from the north end of Lake Winnebago into Green Bay. The current of the lower section of the Fox contrasts greatly with that of the upper river, for the lower Fox drops more than 160 feet in just 39 miles, while the upper portion declines a mere 35 feet over more than twice that distance. The Wolf River from Fremont to the mouth of Lake Poygan had geographic properties that resemble the upper Fox, while north of Fremont, the twisting course of the Wolf closely resembles the features of the lower Fox.

In the early nineteenth century, American pioneers in the Wisconsin territory used the Fox and Wolf Rivers both for transportation of goods and for facilitating immigration. They

² Marcelia Neff, *By Paddle-Wheel, Sail, and Steam* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Private Publication, 1989), 13.

³ Clarence J. Jungwirth, *History of the City of Oshkosh: The Early Years* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Private Publication, 1995), IV, 95. Polk Library Collection, Oshkosh.

shipped lead in flat-bottomed Durham Boats from Galena to Green Bay by way of the Wisconsin-Fox River route. Typical Durham Boats were between forty-five and sixty feet long, with a ten-to-twelve-foot beam, and could carry a load weighing twenty to thirty tons. Ten to twelve men took turns placing poles on the river bottom at the bow and then walked toward the stern, moving the boat forward. Most of the settlers who came to the Lake Winnebago region in the 1830s and 1840s came up the Fox River from Green Bay by means of Durham Boats.⁴

A major move for economic development of the region occurred in 1835, when Federal land sales pushed the frontier line of agricultural settlement in and through the Fox River Valley.⁵ During the decade that followed, speculators and farmers from New England and the Mid-Atlantic States migrated to cities like Chicago and Detroit to purchase tracts of land for urban and agricultural development. Since the majority of these emigrants traveled by water, it was only a matter of time before a few enterprising settlers saw the full economic significance of the Fox/Wolf River route. Cities sprouted up along the river banks and developed quickly: Fond du Lac profited from superior geographical position at the foot of Lake Winnebago, and the city developed in response to the rapid settlement of nearby fertile prairie land. Oshkosh took advantage of both northern forests and the Wolf River flowage to become a concentrated lumber industry town. Neenah, Menasha, and Appleton spawned prosperous milling industries powered by the steady current of the lower Fox.⁶

As these cities and their industries developed, so did the demand for a swift method of transporting goods and people among them. The technological answer to this demand came in the form of the paddle wheel steamboat. From the mid 1850s to the early 1900s, steam-powered packet boats, grouser tugs, standard tugs, and freighters facilitated economic progress and industrial development in the Fox River Valley. Packet boats were both the most common and largest type of boat in the region. These double (sometimes triple) decked steamers were “jacks of all trades,” vessels that carried mixed loads of passengers and freight.⁷

⁴ John W. Arndt, *Pioneers and Durham Boats on the Fox River* (Madison, State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1976), 185-187.

⁵ Charles N. Glaab and Lawrence H. Larsen, *Factories In The Valley: Neenah-Menasha, 1870-1915* (Madison, Wisconsin: Warzalla Publishing Company, 1969), 6.

⁶ Glaab and Larsen, 12.

⁷ Don Mitchell, *Steamboats on the Fox River* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Castle Piece Press, 1986). Local steam-powered water navigation began in 1843 and steadily declined from the 1870s. Don Mitchell witnessed the last Fox River steamboat trip in the summer of 1927.

There were also many steam-powered tugboats at work in the region during the 1800s. One such vessel was a specially rigged boat known as a *grouser tug*. The grouser was developed for the purpose of pulling logs. There were also a number of standard tow boats. Contrary to what their name might suggest, these boats pushed barges and timber rafts from the side or rear – a method still popular for modern diesel tugs. Both types of tug looked like small packet boats with a reinforced stern and bulkhead. By the 1870s, the steam powered tugboats were the second most common boats on the Fox and Wolf.

A typical Fox/Wolf River steam freighter was nothing more than a single-deck steamboat with a small pilothouse at the stern. While some of the steam freighters had fully enclosed hatches, most were simply “flat-bed” cargo carriers. There were no fewer than ten such freighters on the Fox and Wolf Rivers between 1860 and 1890. The average Fox/Wolf freighter could carry approximately two hundred tons of cargo.

Forty per cent of the steamboats that navigated the Fox and Wolf Rivers were packet boats, thirty per cent were tugs, and twenty per cent were freighters (the remaining ten per cent were of indeterminate type). Although they were the largest in terms of overall size, packet steamers were on average fifteen feet shorter than the 130-foot freighters. Steam tugs, which carried little more than fuel and crew, averaged about 70 feet in length.

Like their big brothers on the Mississippi, the vast majority of Fox and Wolf River steamboats possessed a series of decks and bore a resemblance to a huge, rectangular, twin-layer cake.⁸ The lowest level of the vessel, known as the “main deck,” supported the heavy boilers and engines. The main deck also bolstered a second story deck called the “boiler deck,” which carried most freight on cargo runs. Atop the boiler deck, an open-air deck called the “hurricane deck” accommodated cumbersome loads of finished products or baggage. The hurricane deck also sometimes served as the foundation for a small, fully-enclosed structure called the “texas.” The texas provided accommodations for crew members and was typically positioned directly behind the pilot house. The windowed pilot’s cabin, located high and to the front of most Fox/Wolf River steamers, was the control center of the boat. In the pilot’s house, one could find the rudder wheel, internal and external signaling systems (literally bells and whistles), a pot-belly stove, and a “lazy bench” for visiting captains or family members.

⁸ Ralph T. Ward, *Steamboats: A History of Early Adventure* (New York: The Bobbs-Merrill Company, 1973), 74.

Also adopted from Mississippi-style paddle steamers was the support system of chains and diagonal timbers that rivermen referred to as “hog chains.”⁹ The timbers ran skyward from connection points on the hull near the boiler and engine sections and held up chains that would be tightened with turnbuckles to add dynamic tension to the structure. The end result looked similar to the support system used for suspension bridges. This aspect of technology was particularly important to local builders because strength and carrying capacity mattered more than appearance or comfort.

Almost every part of American paddle steamers was made of wood. White oak was the standard for the superstructure and planking, while pine was used for the decks.¹⁰ Iron technology was quickly coming of age, but timber was easier to repair and absorbed more shock, two important advantages to local navigators, because both the Fox and the Wolf Rivers were notoriously filled with hull-ravaging snags and “sawyers” (sand bars) that changed location each spring.¹¹ Exceptions to the “all-wood rule” included propulsion machinery and parts of the paddle wheel and steering mechanism.

Due both to regional river transportation requirements and to the rush to fill the demand, steamboats on the Fox and Wolf Rivers differed significantly from the expansive and elaborately adorned paddle steamers that operated on the Mississippi. Because the Fox River was shallow and winding, local steamboat builders were obliged to construct vessels that were smaller, more maneuverable, and of lighter draft than the standard Mississippi-style paddle wheeler. Specifically, Fox and Wolf River steamers were typically about one hundred feet shorter than their two- to three-hundred foot comrades that maneuvered the Mississippi. Since they were smaller, Fox and Wolf River steamers had smaller engines and half as many boilers. Local boat hulls also had a low length-to-beam ratio (about five to one) and therefore typically drew only two or three feet of water.¹²

Steamboat hulls also varied in shape according to the river in which they operated. In the East, steamboat hulls had moderate “V” shaped hulls that flared outward just above the water line. Such a hull closely resembled those of modern ocean-going vessels. Robert Fulton’s *Clermont*, the first fully functional commercial steamboat, is a prime example. As river ex-

⁹ Ken Watson, *Paddle Steamers: An Illustrated History of Steamboats on the Mississippi and Its Tributaries* (New York: Norton and Company, 1985), 29.

¹⁰ Watson, 54.

¹¹ Watson, 34.

¹² Mitchell, 19.

ploration progressed North and West, depth and width were not adequate to support a hull that drew so much water.¹³ Practical steamboats on western rivers were either entirely flat-bottomed or gently rounded near the perimeter of the hull. Successful commercial steam vessels of the Fox and Wolf River valley, which navigated both narrow river stretches and wide expanses of open water in lakes like Winnebago and Poygan, were hybrids by virtue of necessity. In general, commercially effective Fox and Wolf River steamers were characterized by a hull rounded in the rear and a midsection that narrowed to a steeply “V”-shaped bow.

Another contrast between the Fox/Wolf and Mississippi River systems is the distance that boats had to travel. Due to their long journeys, Mississippi steamers often had second-story staterooms filled with sleeping berths. In contrast, the vast majority of steamboats navigating the Fox and Wolf Rivers rarely made excursion trips longer than one day’s duration. Local steamboat companies had no reason to provide overnight accommodations other than for the crew.

Mississippi-style riverboats were often adorned with elaborate jigsaw scrollwork.¹⁴ This ornamentation served no utilitarian purpose, and the Fox River valley “workhorses” therefore virtually eliminated such frills. Fox Valley boat companies also eliminated frivolities like second story skylight roofs and elaborate interior furnishings, simply because such “extras” added to material costs and lengthened building time. While the standard Fox River vessel was quite unsightly in comparison to the highly decorated Mississippi-style steamer, most were fully capable of efficient transport of people, finished products and raw materials.

At least one majestic exception to the well-established Fox/Wolf “ugly duckling work boat dictum” was built in Oshkosh in 1921. Her name was the *Valley Queen*. This 140-foot-long stern-wheel excursion vessel had a fully-enclosed second floor deck, complete with a dance floor. The picturesque excursion boat also boasted deluxe cabinetwork and a pilothouse ornament. Unfortunately, the *Valley Queen* burned to the waterline after only one full season in operation.¹⁵

Between 1837 and 1840, a group of Green Bay entrepreneurs triggered the boom in local waterborne steam transportation when they negotiated with Captain Peter Hotaling to bring a steam vessel to the Fox River Valley from Buffalo, New York.¹⁶ Three years later, Captain

¹³ Ward, 81.

¹⁴ Watson, 31.

¹⁵ Mitchell, 65.

¹⁶ M. Neff, 15.

Hotaling made regional history when he reached Green Bay in the *Black Hawk*. The crude *Black Hawk* was nothing special to look at. Apparently Captain Hotaling procured an Erie Canal barge and slapped a steam power plant and paddle wheel on it. The vessel was described by the *Milwaukee Courier* as “the queerest-looking steam watercraft that ever condescended to pay us a visit.” Regardless of her appearance, the city of Green Bay was grateful for her arrival. After a brief delay, a rebuild, and a name change, this vessel became the first steamboat providing commercial transportation in the Fox River Valley.

Captain Hotaling at first faced a logistical problem of the highest order when he attempted to penetrate the lower Fox River. Eight violent rapids between Green Bay and Oshkosh were simply impossible for a steam-driven vessel of any size to navigate. The *Black Hawk* made approximately three-quarters of the trip before Captain Hotaling scrapped the idea of being the first man to reach Oshkosh via paddle steamer, but only after he had conducted an exhausting ten-day endeavor to portage the vessel across the Grand Kakalin rapids, where Kaukauna is located today.

Peter Hotaling found out the hard way that the lower Fox River would require major improvement if steam-powered vessels were to be a success. Fortunately, Wisconsin already had a high-powered river-improvement crusader, Morgan L. Martin of Green Bay. In 1831, Martin began working to secure Federal funds to open the Fox to navigation. After fifteen years of tireless lobbying, Martin introduced the Fox-Wisconsin Improvement Bill to Congress while serving as a delegate for the Territory. Martin’s bill provided that “a grant of every odd numbered section of land within three miles of the proposed water route should be available for the raising of funds to improve the Fox River and build a canal across Portage.”¹⁷

In late 1847, President James K. Polk signed Martin’s bill into law. Shortly thereafter, a five-man board was appointed to organize construction. This board was probably the first state board in the history of Wisconsin. In 1848, work on locks began in Menasha, and digging of a canal commenced in Portage in June of the following year. Despite financial setbacks and political problems that hindered the development of the waterways throughout the years, the Fox and Wisconsin Rivers improvement project was completed in 1856.¹⁸

¹⁷ William A. Titus, *History of the Fox River Valley, Lake Winnebago, and the Green Bay Region* (Chicago: S. J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1930), 316.

¹⁸ Titus, 316.

After completion of the waterway, one task that steamboats performed was to dredge the nine (upper) and seventeen (lower) locks of the Fox-Wisconsin system. There were no fewer than ten government-operated steam-powered dredges and grouser tugs at work on the river system on a daily basis by the mid 1870s.¹⁹

By the mid 1860s the demand for steam-powered vessels far exceeded the supply on the Fox and Wolf Rivers. The November 12, 1867 *Oshkosh Times* printed the complaints of a Omro shingle mill owner who stated that the “supply of lumber [alone] is ‘inexhaustible’ and the demand would be five times what it now is, had we the proper facilities for transportation.” Given the level of demand, it became standard practice for local boat builders to produce vessels as quickly and cheaply as they could in order to fill the niche. Nearly every paddle steamer built along the shores of the Fox or Wolf after 1860 was constructed in three months, sometimes less, typically during the winter months.²⁰

Due to the flourishing lumber industry, there was probably no cheaper place in the United States to construct any wood product than in the Fox River Valley during the 1860s and 1870s. An April issue of the 1886 *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern* stated that “western boateries were beginning to understand” the value of Fox Valley boats and noted that out of state orders for new vessels “were coming in every day.”

By the mid-1860s most every community in the Fox River Valley had some sort of boat building industry.²¹ So prolific was the industry that, according to one author, “to list all the builders and the vessels they constructed would be akin to cataloguing the ships which the Greeks launched against the Trojans.”²² For example, an April 1866 issue of the *Oshkosh Northwestern* noted that the Winneconne boat construction firm of Lake, McArthur, and Webster were constructing no less than six grain barges, several other barge frames, and a side-wheel rafting tug. In Oshkosh, the Barnes Company was busy with five more barges, while the companies of Neff and Lynch and R. C. Ryan were building a packet steamer and propeller-driven steam tug, respectively. At Eureka, Weber and Company constructed two more vessels in 1866. Steamboat builders of the Fox and Wolf River region were most active between 1860 and 1870.

¹⁹ Mitchell, 86-111.

²⁰ William Neff, “Our Flotilla” (A chronological survey of Fox and Wolf River vessels), *Oshkosh Daily Courier* (various issues, 1899).

²¹ James Metz, et al., *Prairie, Pines, and People: Winnebago County in a New Perspective* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: The Oshkosh Daily Northwestern, 1976), 259.

²² Metz, 253.

Nearly fifty per cent of all the steamboats that operated on the Fox/Wolf River system were built during this decade.

At least sixty-two steam-driven passenger- and freight-carrying packet boats were built along the shores of the Fox and Wolf Rivers between 1844 and 1908.²³ Conservatively, this meant that the steamboat construction business earned roughly \$992,000 for constructing this type of vessel during the sixty-four-year time span. Forty-two steam-powered tugboats were built in the region between 1853 and 1874.²⁴ Since the average cost of a nineteenth-century steam tug was around \$6000, the total revenue for building these boats during the twenty-one-year period was about \$252,000. While records exist for steam-powered craft, there is no way to tabulate either the individual cost or total number of powerless barges that were built in the area. At least eight were built in 1866. In any event, it is clear that barge-building also made a significant contribution to the local economy.

Following his failed portage of the Grand Kakalin, Captain Hotaling rebuilt the *Black Hawk* on the shores of Lake Winnebago and renamed her the *Manchester*. From 1844 until 1850 the 85-foot-long *Manchester* transported passengers, logs, flour, and lead between ports at Fond du Lac, Taycheedah, Neenah, and Fort Winnebago. Like most of the Fox/Wolf River steamboats that followed her, the combination of the *Manchester's* shallow draft and her long gangplanks allowed her to “dock” just about anywhere along the shoreline of the lake. It is likely that Captain Hotaling also conducted a great deal of business through casual pickups and deliveries along the banks of Lake Winnebago.²⁵

In 1849 a joint stock company of Fox River Valley built the second steamboat of the region, the *Peytonia*. Although the 115 foot-long *Peytonia* suffered financially in her first year, between 1850 and 1853 the *Peytonia* was filled to capacity with settlers on most every one of her daily runs from Oshkosh to Fond du Lac.²⁶ *Peytonia* could probably carry about 300 passengers per trip, which means that she may have hauled as many as 200,000 people on journeys on the lake during those three years.

In 1850 a Menasha firm built the *Menasha*. This vessel is of special interest because the 165-foot-long sidewheeler was probably the largest steamboat that ever navigated the Fox/Wolf

²³ Ray Hughes Whitbeck, *Geography of the Fox River Valley* (Madison, Wisconsin: State of Wisconsin, 1915), 34.

²⁴ W. Neff, 64.

²⁵ Watson, 47.

²⁶ *Oshkosh: One Hundred Years a City, v. I: 1853-1893* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Privately Printed, 1953), 209

waterway. Between 1849 and 1854, at least ten more steamers were built and put to work on the Fox and Wolf Rivers. Of the ten in operation, the *Peytonia*, as well as at least four of the others, were purchased by Fitzgerald and Company of Oshkosh in 1854. During their first year of operation, Fitzgerald and Company boats earned nearly \$40,000 dollars for the locally-based steam transportation company.²⁷

By the late 1800s, the wheat and lumber industries became the principal employers of Fox River Valley steamboat companies. The rise of wheat and lumber milling in the Fox and Wolf River Valleys in the 1850s, 1860s, and 1870s was nothing less than meteoric. The overall cut of Wisconsin timber soared from two hundred million board feet in 1853 to over a billion board feet within twenty years.²⁸ More than half of this lumber was felled from pine forests situated along the Wolf River and its tributaries. Cultivated land devoted to wheat in Wisconsin increased from 325,000 acres in 1850 to 1,215,000 in 1860. The largest wheat crop Wisconsin ever produced, 29,000,000 bushels, was produced in 1860. While wheat farming was at first popular in South Central Wisconsin, by the end of the 1860s, the counties surrounding the Fox River Valley were producing higher yields than any other region of the state.²⁹

Steamboats on the Fox and Wolf Rivers developed the economy of the region by carrying a significant amount of Neenah's and Menasha's flour from mill to market. By 1860, the two cities had at least ten flour mills in operation. In 1861 alone, steam-powered freighters, tugs, and packet boats transported 64,000 barrels of flour from the two cities. Steamboats were also bringing locally grown wheat to the mills. In the same year, more than 126,000 bushels of wheat reached Neenah and Menasha from Green Bay. By the 1870s the annual output of flour for the two cities approximated 300,000 barrels. In 1870, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported that the Lake and River Transportation Company, just one of several steamboat companies, had brought 18,000 barrels of flour into Menasha for processing. Although rail transportation was available by the 1870s, moving wheat from nearby farms to urban milling centers was far less expensive if conducted by steamboat.³⁰

Despite some early setbacks, the steamboat was critical in developing the Fox River Valley lumber industry during the period from 1850 to 1870. From the arrival of the *Black*

²⁷ W. Neff, 28.

²⁸ Glaab and Larsen, 7.

²⁹ Robert C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin*, v. III: *Urbanization and Industrialization, 1873-1893* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 281-283.

³⁰ Metz, 262.

Hawk/Manchester in 1844 until 1853, several of the early Fox and Wolf River steamboats attempted either to push or to pull timber from the Wolf River pine forests to lumber mills and shingle factories in cities such as Oshkosh, Omro, Berlin, and Winneconne.³¹ It was soon discovered that the limited horsepower and design flaws of the earliest river steamers limited their commercial effectiveness in the lumber hauling trade.

This changed with the technological breakthrough pioneered by David Hume of Omro. In 1853, Hume designed a steam-powered craft tailored for log transport and named it the *Swan*. The *Swan* differed from the standard freighting steamboats in that it had a steam winch and was rigged with a “grouser pole.”³² The grouser pole, which had been invented by Hume’s father in 1847, was a long vertical timber that ran through the forward deck of the steamboat and was driven into the riverbed in order to hold the boat in place.³³ During operation, the grouser tug steamed forward and paid out line attached to a set of log rafts. The vessel then positioned the grouser pole, reeled the raft up to the boat, and repeated the process.

Prior to Hume’s invention, 250-foot x 50-foot log rafts typically had been floated down the upper Wolf River to Boom Bay on Lake Poygan. From Boom Bay, the rafts were towed by horseboat to their destination.³⁴ Despite the fact that the Fox River from Boom Bay to Oshkosh has little fall, and consequently only a slow current, a considerable amount of animate “horsepower” was required to move enough of these wooden monstrosities to keep up with the ever-growing demand for timber down river.³⁵

One year after the trial of the *Swan*, a larger and more practical grouser tug, named *Active*, was constructed in Berlin by the Hume family. The *Active* was quite powerful; her horizontal engine cylinders were ten inches larger than those of the *Swan*. She was quickly purchased from the Hume family and put into service. With the coming of the *Active*, steam-powered grouser tugs quickly replaced the horse boat as the standard method transportation for the logging industry for the next thirty years.³⁶

While the introduction of the steam grouser tug had an extremely positive effect on the entire Fox Valley lumber industry, its impact was particularly important to the city of Oshkosh.

³¹ Jungwirth, 94.

³² W. Neff, 29.

³³ W. Neff, 21.

³⁴ Jungwirth, 94.

³⁵ Joseph Schafer, *The Winnebago-Horicon Basin: A Type Study in Western History* (Madison, Wisconsin: State Historical Society, 1937), 289.

³⁶ W. Neff, 30.

By 1867, more than twenty-three tugs worked in the region. Of these, at least half were grousers.³⁷ In that same year the *Oshkosh Daily Times* reported that an estimated 175,000,000 feet of logs yearly were entering the city's thirty-seven sawmills and fifteen shingle factories.³⁸ Captain Edwin Marion Neff noted in his log that by 1874 the number of steam-powered tugs operating on the Fox and Wolf rivers had increased to forty-seven.³⁹ From 1850 to 1870, the population of Oshkosh skyrocketed from 702 to 12,675. This population explosion was largely due to the economic growth driven by the lumber industry, an industry that was facilitated by the introduction of steam-powered log tugs.⁴⁰

Just as steam powered grouser and rafting tugs were primarily responsible for bringing raw timber into Oshkosh for processing, the finished products were often transported either to Green Bay or to Portage by steam freighters and steam-propelled barges. In 1850, Oshkosh mills were yielding 100,000,000 feet of lumber per year and 100,000,000 shingles.⁴¹ Since Oshkosh had no rail transportation at this time, it is probable that the vast majority of the city's finished lumber commodities moved to market by means of steam-powered watercraft.

In the late 1800s, coal began to replace wood as the primary fuel source for industrial and domestic use in the Fox River Valley. The bulk of Northeastern Wisconsin's coal was shipped to Green Bay from Lake Erie ports and from Green Bay to the region's interior. So complete was the acceptance of coal that the annual tonnage arriving at Green Bay skyrocketed from 10,000 to 415,000 tons between 1880 and 1908.⁴²

While rail transportation had become common in Wisconsin by the 1870s, it was still at least thirty per cent cheaper to transport coal from Green Bay to the interior by steamboat.⁴³ Therefore, in the late 1800s steamboats typically included a substantial quantity of this "non-rush" commodity on their cargo manifests. From the late 1880s to the early 1900s, the Cook and Brown Company of Oshkosh operated the *Herman Hitz*, the *R.C. Brown*, and the *B.F. Carter* as coal haulers on the Green Bay-Lower Fox River route.⁴⁴ Each of these three vessels could tow barges holding two or three hundred tons of coal. During the two decades of their operation,

³⁷ W. Neff, 64.

³⁸ W. Neff, 119.

³⁹ Edward Neff, "Neff and Lynch Steamboat Company Ledger," 1874.

⁴⁰ Metz, 13.

⁴¹ *Oshkosh: One Hundred Years a City* (1953), 95.

⁴² Whitbeck, 73.

⁴³ Whitbeck, 52.

⁴⁴ Jungwirth, 95.

these three workhorses moved about 100,000 tons of coal into the Fox River Valley each year.⁴⁵ Much of this coal was used by the burgeoning paper industry, which also received no less than 33,000 tons of pulpwood per year delivered via steamboats up to 1890.⁴⁶

While side-wheel steamers dominated the Fox/Wolf transport industry in the early years, stern-driven vessels like the rugged *B. F. Carter* were built at a ratio of two to one over side-wheelers from 1876 to 1903.⁴⁷ There were several practical reasons for this change: Stern-wheelers were more efficient at pushing barges, because with the wheel positioned astern, its “dip” (the distance the paddles reached into the water) could be adjusted for maximum efficiency. A rear wheel also had the advantage of having the hull push aside floating debris that might otherwise snag in the paddles. Given that the Fox and Wolf Rivers were quite shallow, or “thin,” in the waterman’s jargon, the stern-wheeler had the advantage of being able to back off shoals and sand bars before finding itself too mired to do anything about it.

Notwithstanding her duties as a workhorse, the trusty 110-foot-long *B. F. Carter* was often cleaned up and put to work as an excursion vessel. The rugged *Carter* served patrons of the Fox and Wolf Rivers for 24 years. Considering that the average boat lasted approximately three to five years, it is fair to say that the *B. F. Carter* was probably the most durable steamboat ever built along the shores of the Fox and Wolf Rivers.

On an expanding basis from late 1800s to the mid-1920s, companies like Cook and Brown augmented their incomes by leasing their boats out for recreational excursions. At first the boats were typically used on Tuesdays and weekends for this purpose. One such example was the trip that *Brooklyn* made from Oshkosh to Green Bay in July 1879. The leisurely two-day excursion, which included meals and hotel accommodations, cost just \$2.50 per person.⁴⁸ Berlin’s *Fashion* and *Thistle* were often chartered by Oshkosh businessmen to make day trips to the city. On a trip in August of 1882, travelers were given the opportunity to steam to Oshkosh “to witness maneuvers of the second Wisconsin Military Regiment” for the price of \$1.00.⁴⁹

As time went on and the population and prosperity of the Fox River Valley grew, the excursion business became a viable trade in its own right. By the 1900s, nearly as many

⁴⁵ *Oshkosh: One Hundred Years a City* (1953), 95.

⁴⁶ Whitbeck, 36.

⁴⁷ J. L. Barton, “Tabulation of Steamboats on the Fox and Wolf Rivers” (Oshkosh Public Museum Archives, 1909).

⁴⁸ Robert E. Gard and Elaine Reetz, *The Trail of the Serpent* (Madison, Wisconsin: Wisconsin House Ltd. Book Publishers, 1973), 12.

⁴⁹ Gard and Reetz, 172.

steamboat “days of the river season” were devoted to passenger service (mainly chartered cruises) as were devoted to freight. In 1903, the *Oshkosh Weekly Courier* carried an article stating that 13,027 people visited the city via steamboat in that year and 12,200 had done so the year before. The travelers had arrived from Berlin, Eureka, Omro, Neenah, Menasha, and the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago. The average number of patrons for each trip was approximately 200. Since the average fare was around \$1.00, excursion traffic in 1903 and 1904 netted transportation companies in the area of \$25,000. The *Courier* also estimated that each patron spent an average of \$5 per person during their visit, which meant that Oshkosh businesses gained approximately \$126,000 from the local travelers during those same two years.

Aside from their cargoes of lumber, wheat, coal, and passengers, the steamboats of the Fox and Wolf Rivers carried everything from broomsticks to sand to apples to clamshells. In 1861, the *Oshkosh Weekly Manufacturer* noted that the steamers *Bay City* and *Fountain City* were filled with produce and finished products “to overflowing on every trip” from Green Bay to the cities of the lower Fox.⁵⁰ Considering that these twin 130-foot side-wheelers made the trip one way each day, it is probable that they delivered no less than 12,000 tons of various cargo during that year alone. In June 1861, the *Manufacturer* noted that seven boats passed the locks at Menasha within a one-hour time span. Among these vessels, the steam tug *Neenah* towed two barges of wheat and flour, while another, called the *Lady Jane*, pushed three more barges filled with “salt, lumber, and merchandise.” In 1868, the *Oshkosh City Times* reported that in a single day the *Winnebago*, the *E.P. Weston*, the *Island City*, and the *Verona* were loaded with products at Colvin’s Dock in Oshkosh. These boats steamed to Oshkosh from Green Bay on the Fox, from the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago, and from Berlin, on the upper Fox. If these vessels made even one trip per week and carried thirty tons per trip, they would have transported a minimum of 840 tons of goods per vessel in a standard seven-month season.⁵¹

Well into the last years of the nineteenth century, there were more than 12,000 annual passages through the seventeen locks of the lower Fox alone. Through these locks in 1890 passed a grand total of 389,291 tons of goods. Tonnage totals for that year included 33,446 tons of pulpwood, 35,034 tons of brick, 2,510 tons of general merchandise, 321 tons of perishables in

⁵⁰ Metz, 261.

⁵¹ Metz, 261.

the form of beer, fish, potatoes, apples, and cranberries, and five tons of broomsticks.⁵² Probably the largest single object ever transported via Fox/Wolf steamboat was a 42-foot-high grist mill. The 40 x 55 x 42-foot Reliance Flouring Mill was positioned atop a pair of barges and pushed from Winneconne to Oshkosh by the steam tug *Ajax* on July 4 and 5, 1879. According to the July 5 issue of the *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, “Captain [Edward] Neff pushed [the mill] to the foot of the Minnesota Street bridge” in Oshkosh in just three hours.

By the late 1870s, the steam-powered locomotive was starting to displace the steamboat from its role as the key means of commercial transportation in the Fox River Valley. The “iron horse” was faster, operated on a year-round schedule, and could travel a much straighter, and therefore shorter, course than that offered by the rivers. Considering the economic explosion and the length of the winters in the Fox River Valley, when steamboats came to a halt, it was simply a matter of time before steam-powered transportation via rail took the place of the river steamer in the region.

The multifaceted efficiency of the locomotive eventually quashed the steamboat’s ability to compete as a commercial entity in the Fox River Valley. In 1862, the Chicago and Northwestern extended its tracks along the eastern shore of Lake Winnebago to Green Bay.⁵³ In 1871, the Wisconsin Central Rail Road opened a western line from Neenah to Stevens Point. Eleven years later, a competitor opened rail service from the Fox Valley to Milwaukee.⁵⁴ These three routes define a key reason for the ascendancy of the “iron horse” over the steamboat, for they connected the Fox Valley directly to the growing metropolitan marketplaces of Milwaukee, Minneapolis, and Chicago.

Direct routes and faster travel were a powerful combination for both passenger and freight transportation. In January 1865, a traveler could get on a train in Omro at 5:00 A.M. and arrive in Milwaukee an hour before noon.⁵⁵ Even the earliest locomotives could travel a straight route at somewhere between 10 and 15 miles an hour. Compared to the day-long trips the *Manchester* made crossing the 20-plus miles of Lake Winnebago just a few years earlier, this more rapid form of transportation was seen as revolutionary in a rapid growth region where both distance-to-time parameters and enthusiasm for modern technology were paramount. And of

⁵² Whitbeck, 36.

⁵³ Nesbit, 314.

⁵⁴ Glaab and Larsen, 17.

⁵⁵ Metz, 274.

course, the journey by rail from Omro to Milwaukee could be made in January, a time when all steamboat transportation had been halted months before and would remain at a standstill until the spring thawing of the lake and river system.

The steamboats that navigated the Fox and Wolf Rivers between 1843 and the early 1900s served as the first mechanical agent of commercial transportation for the region. Prior to their arrival, the only way to move bulk commodities in and out of Wisconsin's interior had been by such inefficient means as horse teams, human-propelled Durham boats, horse boats, and perhaps by schooners that were limited to the lakes and were at the constant mercy of the wind. None of these transportation methods provided travel at a sustained speed, nor could they move their cargoes any faster than two to five miles per hour. With the arrival of the *Black Hawk* in 1843, it suddenly had become possible to move large quantities of raw materials and finished goods throughout the Fox River Valley at speeds of up to ten miles an hour, whether with or against the current. Within fifteen years of the *Black Hawk* revolution, Wisconsin's pioneers had modified the river system enough to initiate a speedy interstate distribution service that fostered economic and industrial development in the interior of East Central Wisconsin. During the next three decades, the paddle steamer operated on this lake and river, canal, and lock system as the principal method of commercial transportation.

The technical revolution was swift. Steam-powered Fox and Wolf River grouser tugs had virtually eliminated the archaic horse boat by the mid-1850s. The steam tugs filled a huge demand by offering the lumber industry the great advantage of reduced transportation time for raw materials. Between 1850 and 1870, steam grouser tugs spurred cities like Oshkosh to rapid growth by moving no less than two billion feet of raw timber to Fox Valley mills. By 1860 Winnebago County, in which Oshkosh is located, was second only to Milwaukee County in terms of industrial output, mainly due to the lumber industry.⁵⁶ From this timber, Oshkosh produced more than 2,000 tons of shingles and 1,000,000 tons of lumber. These products together brought a minimum of \$15,000,000 in revenue for the Oshkosh lumber industry during this twenty year time span. Steam-powered grouser and standard tugs continued to fill this commercial transportation niche well into the 1880s.

In the 1860s, flour production became centered in the Fox Valley and therein generated further demand for rapid and reliable bulk transportation. Once again, the steamboat answered

⁵⁶ Metz, 246.

the call and filled the niche by offering speedy and reliable distribution from farm to mill and from mill to market. Since the average barrel of wheat cost approximately \$4 during the 1860s, it is probable that Fox River steamboats carried no less than \$2.4 million worth of milled wheat during the decade, and a significant amount was transported thereafter. By 1870, the milling centers of Neenah and Menasha were second only to Milwaukee in the Wisconsin flour milling industry.⁵⁷

As the era progressed, steam-powered tugs, packet boats and freighters further contributed to regional economic development by moving coal, people, and various other agricultural and manufactured products in and out of the Fox and Wolf River Valley. Between 1880 and 1910, steamboats transported no less than \$10 million worth of high-demand coal for use in factories and homes of the region, and they shipped an average of at least another million dollars worth of other products annually. Added to these dollar figures were the financial gains accrued by development of the steamboat excursion business, which, even if it operated for just four years at full capacity, netted local businessmen and boat companies approximately \$300,000. The boat construction business, which contributed a minimum of another \$1.2 million, must also be taken into account. Thus the total dollar figure for the value of all products carried by Fox River steamboats from the late 1840s to the early 1900s approximated \$76.2 million, expressed in the dollars of the day.

In 1927 Fox Valley residents witnessed the last vestige of commercial steamboat transportation on the Fox-Wolf River system. On a summer day in that year the *Mayflower II* pulled away from Neenah on her final trip to Oshkosh. The fate of the steamboat had been sealed by the advent of the steam-powered locomotive. As tracks were laid across the State, it rapidly became evident that the high cost of maintaining the Fox-Wisconsin river system could no longer be justified. Regional bulk waterborne transportation via steamboat was systematically supplanted by railroads during the decades between the late 1860s and the early 1900s.

⁵⁷ Metz, 249.

“Self Portrait,” 1854
Mark Robert Harrison
Oil on Canvas

Art and Commerce in Fond du Lac: Mark Robert Harrison, 1819-1894

Sonja J. Bolchen

On a walk through Fond du Lac's most famous and most historic cemetery, one instantly recognizes on the headstones the chiseled family names of those who left their mark on Fond du Lac: Tallmadge, Doty, Darling, and Pier among others. These nineteenth-century city pioneers in government and commerce lie at rest among their progeny in Rienzi Cemetery as if it were some kind of perpetual town meeting for the city's rich and influential families. Close by, on the downward slope of the hill that marks the oldest area of the cemetery, one headstone catches the eye. It stands alone, without the security of nearby family members, and reads only "Mark R. Harrison, 1819-1894." Carved from granite by Robert P. Powrie, Fond du Lac's best known sculptor, the marker is decorated above the name by a raised relief profile of a long-haired, bearded face, and below by a simple artist's palette. Who was this distinguished-looking man, Mark R. Harrison, and what was his position among all of these "greats" in a city by a lake?

Mark Robert Harrison, one of Anne Bellmore and Robert Launcelot Harrison's eight boys, was born at Hovingham, in the North Riding of Yorkshire, England, September 7, 1819. Launcelot Harrison had been disowned by his Catholic Cheshire kinsmen for embracing the Protestant faith when he married. Perhaps this played a role in the elder Harrison's decision to emigrate with the family. They settled in Westmoreland, Oneida County, New York in 1822. Widowed four years later, Mrs. Harrison moved with her children to Hamilton, Ontario. Little more is recorded of Mark Robert Harrison's family, except that from his mother, herself an artist of no mean ability, he seems to have inherited a talent for painting.¹ She recognized his promise and saw to it that he was educated at art schools in Canada and in New York. Molded both by his formal education, under renowned artists like Henry Inman, and by subsequent travels abroad, Harrison developed a talent that would make his name synonymous with culture in nineteenth-century Fond du Lac.

¹. *Portrait and Biographical Album of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*. Local History, 1890, 230. There is no collection of Mark Harrison papers, nor does any of his correspondence survive in an archive to aid the historian. Therefore, this paper is largely based on Harrison's contemporaries' views of him, expressed in the Wisconsin newspaper press, and through an appreciation of his surviving paintings on public display.

“Wilson’s Woods,”
Mark Robert Harrison
Oil on Canvas

The precise reason why Harrison settled in the lower Fox Valley in the mid-nineteenth century is not known. Many Easterners had moved westward to the new states, envisioning increased chances for wealth and fame. *New York Times* articles of the day headlined the need and opportunity for New York School artists who were willing to work in other cities.²

Harrison's name, however, first appears in Fox River Valley newspapers in 1849 not as an artist, but as an investor. He apparently arrived in Oshkosh intent on quick financial success by investing with his brother in the steamboat industry. His failure as an "investor only" in this highly unstable market seems to be what gave later writers license to refer to him as a failed or pathetic business mind. As early as 1853, Oshkosh papers reported his loss of choice land due to the failed investment.³ His 1894 obituary detailed that he lacked business acumen because of the failed enterprise.⁴ Later authors estimate that he lost up to \$10,000 of his own money, an amount he had amassed through the sale of his paintings while he was in Canada. Apparently nearly all of his early artwork produced in Canada was destroyed by fire in 1844.⁵

This negative assessment of Harrison ignores the fact that he ran a very successful art business in Fond du Lac. He produced paintings at a prolific rate, lived comfortably off his earnings, and was able to donate substantial sums of money to the City and to local charities at his death. An 1879 *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth* article gave an account of one instance of Harrison's financial success. "The celebrated artist of the Northwest, last week sold and is now shipping, to New York parties, a number of paintings valued at \$4,600."⁶ A *Milwaukee Sentinel* article reported in 1867 that Harrison's *Castle Canon* was sold in the East for \$10,000.⁷ Compared with the amount of money that Harrison earned throughout his career, the failed steamship investment in Oshkosh was trivial.

Fortunately for Harrison and his career, during his first years in the Fox Valley as an investor in his steamship enterprise, the newspapers were more interested in his art. While they covered the Harrison brothers' *D. B. Whitacre* and *John Mitchell* steamship investments and the operations of the steamships themselves, newspaper articles included thorough descriptions of the oil paintings that Mark Harrison had provided for the steamboats. In an article supposedly

² *New York Times*, November 7, 1892.

³ *Oshkosh Weekly Courier*, August 23, 1853.

⁴ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, December 7, 1894.

⁵ *Fond du Lac Times*, September 30, 1967.

⁶ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, December 13, 1879.

⁷ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 25, 1867.

announcing and advertising the passenger comfort and accommodations of the *D.B. Whitacre*, the article instead was devoted primarily to the Harrison oil paintings that decorated the wheelhouse. Touting their own cities, local newspapers and those who wrote for them eagerly celebrated their newly-discovered local oil painter and his work. Heralding the arrival of Harrison in Fond du Lac, the February 1850, *Reporter* article stated, “we have had the pleasure of seeing the paintings intended for the wheel house, executed by Mark Harrison, a celebrated artist from New York [c]ity. They are beautifully executed and the design we think very appropriate.”⁸ Although one cannot be certain, it is hardly surprising that Harrison chose Fond du Lac as the place to pursue his painting career after the Oshkosh steamboat investment soured. The locally influential voice of the Fond du Lac press chose to admire and value his oil paintings. The people of Fond du Lac did not associate him with failed investments, but rather with New York City and middle class culture. A pathetic business mind he was not, for at the very least Harrison recognized a market for his paintings.

By 1852, Harrison was working at an office on Mason Darling’s block. Dr. Darling, probably the most influential man of the town, took immediate interest in Harrison’s work.⁹ He displayed Harrison’s works at the popular Darling Hall. Almost humbling itself, the *Fond du Lac Reporter* described one of the early displays. “We have examined several specimens of the painting of Mr. Mark Harris[on] of this village, and, although we do not pride ourself [sic] on the correctness of our taste in such matters, we are sure that good judges cannot help admiring the execution of the scenery portrayed by the pencil of the great artist.” The article ended with a subtle reminder to the citizen reader. “We hope he [Harrison] will receive the encouragement at the hands of our citizens, which his genius merits.”¹⁰ Fond du Lac opinion makers, through the local newspaper press, certainly were doing their best to stimulate community interest in the value of his art.

Did Harrison achieve his fame in Fond du Lac because of his extraordinary artistic ability or because he was adopted by the community as a favorite son? The question is open to debate. This is of course an issue of values that is rooted in one’s perspective. What cannot be disputed is the impact that Harrison, his paintings, and his legacy had on the people of Fond du Lac. In their insightful study of microcosmic social events as reflected in cultural history, *The History of*

⁸ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, February 8, 1850.

⁹ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1991), 24.

¹⁰ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, January 15, 1852.

Everyday Life, editors Alf Ludtke and Wolfgang Kaschuba eloquently described and explained that:

It is a matter of fundamental perspective whether historical everyday life is described as a mere “situation,” a passive swimming along with the current constraints, obligations, routines, reduced to behavior that is only “stereotypical reproduction” of given and present cultural patterns (Maurice Godelier)—or whether one sees everyday life as an arena where active and creative abilities are aimed at achieving something in material and social reproduction.¹¹

In other words, we may ask the question whether Harrison succeeded because his great talent contributed to the arena of American oil painting, or did he succeed because the citizens of Fond du Lac, in order to achieve middle class identity, needed to produce their own local representative of the vogue for oil painting?

For more than three centuries, European painters and aristocrats had worked together to make art appreciation a mark of cultural standing. By the nineteenth century, they had been joined by an emergent and identifiable middle class. Newly wealthy and in the process of defining its own values, this group tended to look upward socially, emulating the old aristocracy. In order to validate itself socially and culturally, the new American elite sought to prove its tastes equal to those of Europe, and American painters helped fulfill that need. But for the cultural phenomenon to become truly American, the art itself had to be unique or special to America. Simply producing imitations of classic art styles in Europe did not meet the goal of asserting a unique American experience. “The situation of a painter in New York (during the early nineteenth century), to one accustomed to the proud atmosphere of art in Paris, was chilling and depressing. There was no Emperor to distribute honors, no Louvre to lend prestige to painting, no Salon to attract the attention of society.”¹² Those who were intent on raising the level of American tastes needed to look to something exclusively American that could offer inspiration.

The United States was developing into a very diverse culture. Waves of immigrants flooding the Atlantic seaboard and frontier implanted a desire among proud Americans to establish and to retain an individual and identifiable character.¹³ Perhaps that desire led frustrated American painters to embrace what they knew firsthand, namely, American battles and

¹¹ Alf Ludtke, ed., *History of Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1995), 169.

¹² E. P. Richardson, *A Short History of Painting in America: The Story of 450 Years* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1956), 73.

¹³ Richardson, 132.

American history. The natural backdrop for these scenes was the American landscape. Once they were satisfied with the representation of heroic America, the artists would evolve the landscape to serve not only the background of paintings, but as the intended subject of the painting. Imagine the frustration of an American muralist with no significant architecture or grand rotunda to use as a subject to capture a representation of the beauty of America. But with the evolution of landscape painting, at last, the vast, beautiful and untouched scenery of the New World could serve as the subject, and the American painter could feel empowered because he had an awe-inspiring subject unique to America.

Paint they did. The rising number of middle class Americans, coupled with growing American wealth, created quite a demand, first for traditional portrait art, and gradually for new, uniquely American art. New York would rise to become the heart of both American culture and spirit. Americans were turning away from Boston and Philadelphia as cultural epicenters of the New World. Although they housed the only two art schools in America, these cities were seen as too representative of the English colonial era.¹⁴ In 1802, the first step was taken to found the New York Academy of Fine Arts, although the school did not actually incorporate until 1808. But all along the Hudson River, American painters joined together and shared ideas for the purpose of creating a name for themselves in the world of art. Throughout the nineteenth century, these painters would be the original influences and teachers for almost every painter in the country. Their style and success is mirrored in Harrison's work along with the work of many others of his time.

The *Encyclopedia of American Art* and other texts point out that a distinction should be made between members of the school itself and the many painters across the country who painted in the realistic Hudson River School Style, a group of artists varying widely in ability.¹⁵ Harrison's paintings were among these derivative works. His canvasses were consistent with the growth and change of the school. By the 1830s, "Nature," central to the definition of the Hudson River School, had become the most popular subject for American artists as well as writers. Ralph Waldo Emerson and William Cullen Bryant, both astute observers and popular writers about nature, helped pave the way to success for the tightly knit group of male painters, based mostly in New York, who could not resist painting the beauty of the land around them.

¹⁴ Samuel Isham, *The History of American Painting* (New York: Macmillan Company, 1933), 185.

¹⁵ Milton Rugoff, editor, *Encyclopedia of American Art* (New York: E. P. Dutton, 1981), 291.

The American wilderness, after all, was inspirational. Its vast, fresh, and healthy landscape caught the attention of many who had grown tired of what was seen as the dark, overused European backdrop. Landscape art took over the framework for defining moral order and inspiring moral action. Throughout the nineteenth century, the American public placed the Hudson River School and its artists at the center of what was the “Golden Age” of art appreciation for American painters.¹⁶ The overwhelming popularity of a single style in America has not been equaled since.

The ideological precursor to the Hudson River School is to be found in the work of Thomas Doughty (1793-1856). In his paintings, and in the work of the first generation of the school in general, one notices parallel concerns to record the American countryside and to express the higher spiritual content of the natural world. Painters of the Hudson River School, unlike European painters of the Romantic period, defined a moral order in the framework of the natural world. Although Doughty came earlier, it was the enormously successful painter Thomas Cole (1801-1848) who generally is thought of as the founder of the Hudson River School. Cole arrived in Ohio from England in 1818 and was working successfully in New York as a landscape painter by 1825. Although born abroad, Cole dearly loved the American landscape and is said to have declared that he would give his left hand to be identified with the country by birth.¹⁷ He influenced other painters and followers of the school to go out to nature with their sketchbooks and then wait “for time to draw a veil over the common details of a scene so that he could depict only its great features.”¹⁸ His paintings can be generalized as religious subjects framed by nature. In other words, there was usually an allegorical scene set quaintly within a natural setting, presenting an almost tunnel-like effect. Many other artists followed Cole’s concentration on and conception of nature, including his friend, Henry Inman (1801-1846), who was Mark Harrison’s own instructor at the New York Academy of Design.

Harrison, only fourteen years old at the start of his formal schooling in painting, studied under Inman from 1833 until 1838 at the New York Academy of Design. Besides influencing Harrison to take up the Hudson River School style, Inman can probably be credited with inspiring Harrison in the craft of marketing artwork. Regarded by 1838 as the best-paid

¹⁶ Limits of space prevent extensive treatment of art history terminology. Era names and technical terms may be examined in any standard text on painting.

¹⁷ Isham, 194.

¹⁸ John Wilmerding, ed., *The Genius of American Painting* (New York: William Morrow, 1973), 121.

American painter, Inman obtained commissions for portrait work, was successful with sales of his landscape subjects, and followed carefully what the public fancied.¹⁹ Early in the nineteenth century, Inman recognized the ascension of the merchant class in the cities and towns of the new nation, and perceived its need to define itself culturally. Inman made a good living providing portraits for the public. Portraits in oils were in heavy demand from those wishing to flaunt their cultural and social stature and the canvasses were extremely profitable to the commissioned artist. But portrait painting was only Inman's bread and butter. He had also painted American landscapes from the beginning of his career, long before such subjects gained overwhelming popularity. One study of American painting states that "the public wanted portraits and would pay for no other kind of painting. When artists painted other types of subject matter, it was to please themselves."²⁰ When asked about his decision to show some landscape canvasses in 1828, Inman responded, "I tell you, sir, the business of a few generations of artists in this country as in all others is to prepare the way for their successors—for the time will come when the rage for portraits in America will give way to a purer taste."²¹ American landscape art was the "purer taste" Inman predicted. It was given life and popularity by Doughty, Inman, Cole and the other early founders of the Hudson River School.

The problem with this first generation of Hudson River School landscape painters, and Cole especially, was that they were pulled in two distinct directions. Cole, with his overseas Romantic influence, increasingly preferred "moralizing compositions that could display the virtuosity of his technique and his intellect."²² However, the public, proud of their new nation, wanted him to paint recognizable American scenes. Perhaps that is why, in the years just preceding Cole's death in 1848, a second generation of the school was born. The Hudson River School can be described as shifting from the romantic, allegorical, natural world into the depiction of a more realistic natural world. Led by Asher B. Durand (older than Cole and credited with discovering his talent) and Frederic E. Church, this second generation of landscape artists abandoned Cole's idealistic and moralistic scenes in favor of a more "perfectly real" image of nature, such as that described by emerging authors like Henry David Thoreau.

¹⁹ Rugoff, 300.

²⁰ Richardson, 110.

²¹ Isham, 201.

²² Rugoff, 119.

This new brand of painter embraced the wants of the American public and purposefully ignored European precedents and styles. “Do not go abroad,” Durand soberly advised his colleagues, “in search of material for the exercise of your pencil while the virgin charms of our native land have claims on our deepest affections.”²³ Artists of this generation were intent on painting distinctly and recognizably American scenes. Their work differed from that of the first generation in the attention paid to detail and in the individuality given to depictions, particularly those of species of wildlife. Durand is said to have told younger painters to “make careful sketches of details and scenes, never allow brushwork to become noticeable, and paint light and atmosphere as actually observed.”²⁴ His theories aligned themselves closely with those of Thoreau, who had written that “the universe is not rough-hewn, but perfect in its details. Nature will bear the closest inspection”²⁵ The subject matter of the paintings of the second generation of the Hudson River School were the purely natural and topographical wonders of the world, like the Andes, the Adirondacks and the Near East.

Beginning with the Civil War, the school took on a less optimistic outlook. The war devastated great portions of the American landscape, and the processes of industrialization blackened the pristine image of the nation. The third generation artists captured this gloomier sensation in their work. It no longer seemed relevant to celebrate every leaf of the landscape, but rather to embrace the more imaginative “French Style” of landscape painting, which meant looser brushwork and more somber colors. Many second-generation Hudson River School painters, like Church, did not evolve their styles to suit this new approach. Thus, their paintings seemed increasingly artificial as times and tastes changed. Therefore, artists like George Inness (1825-1894), inspired by Durand and Church, but willing and able to expand with the spirit of the times, embodied the third stage of the Hudson River School.

Harrison seemed to borrow from and be influenced by all three of the generations of the Hudson River School. Like the trend-conscious middle classes, Harrison kept his style up to date with what the members of the Hudson River School were doing. But Harrison’s compositions have not been held in the kind of regard that is applied to the works of some of his contemporaries. His paintings are derivative. His works resemble those of the founders, but they are not their equivalent. In their current state of preservation, those of Harrison’s works on

²³ Alexander Eliot, *300 years of American Painting* (New York: Time Incorporated, 1957), 73.

²⁴ Rugoff, 151.

²⁵ Rugoff, 152.

“Heart of the Andes,” (after 1860)

Mark Robert Harrison

Oil on Canvas

public display do not compare in quality to the famous Hudson River School works. His techniques appear fuzzy, his brushwork is sometimes obvious, despite the artist's objective of a perfectly realistic image, and his reproductions of changing light in nature seem artificial. Nevertheless, Harrison has received great praise and recognition from local critics over the last one hundred fifty years.

Considering that Harrison was the same age as many members of the Hudson River School, and that he lived, studied and worked with them, it was only natural for his work to embody closely those characteristics that were typical of the immediate successes of the Hudson River School. He was painting before Durand advised American artists not to travel abroad. For this reason the observer can identify in Harrison's work the European influence upon the earlier members of the school. Romantic and moral elements, typical of Doughty and Cole, are evident in his early paintings. An 1852 *Milwaukee Sentinel* review of Harrison's paintings described his pieces the *Crucifixion*, the *Creation*, and the *Nativity of Christ*. From their titles alone, one can perceive the tremendous allegorical influences of the work of the earliest founders of the Hudson River School. The *Sentinel* critic also detailed Harrison's ability to treat light as a changing phenomenon in order to represent different periods of the day and to express the moods that accompanied those changes. The *Milwaukee Sentinel* praised both the realistic and the allegorical elements of the *Crucifixion*:

To appreciate it he (the viewer) must be present at the exhibition and see the gorgeous city, in the background, and Mount Calvary, unoccupied by human figures, fading from bright mid-day to midnight darkness from the effects of the gathering clouds above—he must hear the chilling roar of thunder, and see the vivid flashes of light leaping from the clouds above, illuminating the scene and exhibiting Mount Calvary peopled by an excited host of human beings, clustered around our Savior nailed to the cross, with his immediate followers kneeling at his feet—the alarm and horror depicted upon the countenance of the soldiers as they behold the dead rising from their graves and standing forth to behold the awful scene. The scene lights up from the discolored rays of the Sun, through the broken cloud, giving every object a gloomy distinctness, while the accursed city of Jerusalem, in the background, is covered by the black pall of the dread darkness.²⁶

Also inspired by Durand and the second generation of Hudson River School painters, Harrison embraced the idea of individuality and particularity of botanical and zoological species

²⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, May 12, 1853.

that is associated with the style of the middle generation of the school. He abandoned his allegorical subjects in favor of natural and topographical scenes around him and identifiable subjects of local interest in nature. It is this era of the Hudson River School that inspired and influenced most of Harrison's work. After all, this was the period in which he produced the most paintings. In line with the concept of exactness in nature, an 1854 *Oshkosh Weekly Courier* article covering the opening of his first studio stated, "Among the new paintings which adorns Mr. Harrison's showroom is a vase of prairie flowers which he gathered with his own hands last summer and copied with such exactness that one almost feels to stoop to inhale the fragrance."²⁷

Harrison produced a number of original paintings and reproductions of work identified with the second generation of the Hudson River School. For example, Frederic E. Church completed his South American landscape masterpiece, *Heart of the Andes*, in 1859. It sold for \$10,000, the highest price paid up to that time for a painting by a living American artist.²⁸ It is no wonder that Mr. Harrison chose to duplicate it. The painting, considered one of the most valuable of the Harrison collection, now hangs in the Fond du Lac Public Library, donated in 1906 by J. W. Hiner, a Chicago attorney originally from Fond du Lac.²⁹ According to 1906, *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter* coverage of the donation, "Steel engravings were made from the original, one of them passing into the hands of Gen. C.H. Hamilton of Milwaukee (formally of Fond du Lac) and loaned to Mr. Harrison by him."³⁰

Harrison produced many paintings representing topographical wonders, works that are typical of the second-generation era of the Hudson River School. As recommended by Durand, Harrison personally visited the American marvels he intended to paint. After he was commissioned to do a painting in 1867 for a Chicago businessman, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported, "Mr. Harrison intends to visit the Rocky Mountains in person during the coming year, and we shall look for some paintings from his brush that will make him the peer of the greatest artists on the continent."³¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel* coverage alone, between 1868 and 1871, reviewed eleven new paintings including, *Mount Ogden*, *Devils Lake*, *Autumn in the Adirondacks*, *Mora Amid the Mountains*, *Landscape in the Rocky Mountains*, and *Sunset on the Mountains*. A description of *Mora Amid the Mountains*, by E. Coleman, correspondent for the *Milwaukee Sentinel*, detailed

²⁷ *Oshkosh Weekly Courier*, December 27, 1854.

²⁸ Rugoff, 116.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, February 7, 1906.

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, January 26, 1906.

³¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, September 20, 1867.

the realistic depiction of nature and of species typical of the influence of the second generation of Hudson River School, which had by that time supplanted the allegorical conceptions of the first generation:

On a small grass plateau in the foreground a herd of beautiful deer have risen to hail the advent of morning. Their natural protector, a stately buck stands as if listening to the sounds from a distant enemy, and ready to fight for his flock. A beautiful doe is drinking from a rocky spring, while at the right another of the herd is coming to sight from behind a hill. Fawn and deer are scattered around the plateau in various attitudes. There is nothing about it which even the poorest critic cannot appreciate and enjoy, while the proficient will find only harmony, beauty, exquisite symmetry and finish, and complete fidelity to nature. In gazing upon it one involuntarily feels himself in the clear cooling air of morning and wakening to new life.³²

Later, *The Milwaukee Sentinel* described the detail of *Mount Ogden*, a painting Harrison rendered from a sketch by Edgar Conklin, Esq. “The reflection of the rocks in the water could not be more true to nature than Mr. Harrison had made it.”³³

By the time the third generation of the school developed, the aging Harrison already had made a name for himself in the Wisconsin cultural scene. Perhaps this explains why his works are less representative of the third generation of the school. Central to the spirit of the third generation was the goal of representing the devastation of the land by the war and industry. Perhaps Harrison’s sketches do not reflect that spirit because in the place where he was living, Wisconsin, the land had not been devastated by battles. And although industry was expanding in the Fond du Lac area, it was certainly not so depressing nor so intrusive upon the landscape as was the industry along the northern Atlantic coast or Great Lakes cities. Between 1860 and 1879, newspaper coverage suggests that Harrison seemed to be painting in his usual style, amassing wealth through steady production of commissioned works for prominent members of society.

The people of Wisconsin were proud to have an artist among them. During Harrison’s time the people of the Fond du Lac area were beginning to accumulate some wealth. Just as New York had sought to surpass Boston and Philadelphia in the world of art appreciation, the people on the “frontier” were anxious to reveal to Easterners, and to themselves, that moving westward did not mean losing one’s sense of culture. The newspaper coverage was adamant in

³² *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 1, 1869.

³³ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 25, 1867.

encouraging the public to experience and to appreciate oil painting. Anxious to keep pace with the development in the East, Wisconsinites needed not only to cultivate artists, but also to erect some suitable places to view art. One might argue that artists separated from the cultural centers of the East could never attain a high level of public esteem or reputation due to the absence of suitable exhibition places for their work. Wisconsin newspapers appear to have been aware of this perception, because they frequently referred to the conditions of the local galleries as inadequate. Harrison largely was dependent on public and commercial buildings to display his art in Fond du Lac. He made use of Darling Hall and local businesses such as Johnson's Saloon as well as Messrs. Darling and Dodge's Music and Book Store.³⁴

Following the example of artists like Church and others along the Hudson River, Harrison eventually displayed his works at his home studio. In fact, the newspapers celebrated the opening of Harrison's original viewing room. The December 27, 1854, *Oshkosh Weekly Courier* announced, "Yes kind reader, we have in Fond du Lac a Gallery of Art. We stepped in, a few days since to see our friend Mark R. Harrison. We found him in his new rooms just fitted up in a part of what used to be Windeckers Hall. He [Harrison] is constantly bringing to light some superb portrait or delightful landscape scene which would be a valuable acquisition and an honor to any Gallery of Art."³⁵ By May of 1887, the papers were quite obvious in the pride they took in their art gallery. The *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth* proudly announced:

Many of the cities of the United States, west as well as east, are only too glad to provide attractive quarters for an art collection, if indeed they do not willingly expend a considerable sum of money in the purchase of works of art as a general attraction. . . . Fond du Lac is remarkably fortunate in the possession of an art collection of more than usual merit, and in which the citizen may pass hours of refined study Last year M. R. Harrison erected a new building on Sixth Street. In the art room he has now about 130 pictures.³⁶

Nearly every art critic mentioned the deplorable conditions of the viewing halls. As late as 1950, critics still blamed the gallery for the limited degree to which paintings could be appreciated. About a display of Harrison's works at the Wisconsin State Historical Society, the

³⁴ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, January 15, 1852.

³⁵ *Oshkosh Weekly Courier*, December 27, 1854.

³⁶ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, May 20, 1887.

critic explained, “In their present setting, the Harrison paintings have as much chance to live as a violet set in concrete.”³⁷

In spite of the conditions of the various exhibition places, Harrison managed to have his works praised in print constantly. Story upon story extolled what commentators regarded as his exceptional ability. As early as 1850, the *Fond du Lac Reporter* referred to him as a “celebrated artist who wonderfully executes.”³⁸ In 1853, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* described him as having received, “the highest praise from persons qualified to judge their excellence.”³⁹ By 1867, the *Milwaukee Sentinel* reported of Harrison, “if he is not *King* of western artists, [he] is certainly *Prime Minister*.”⁴⁰ The praise of his work was continuous throughout his career.

The question remains, was that praise a result of his great talent, or a result of the need of the people’s need to replicate Eastern praise of similar work? Another 1867 *Milwaukee Sentinel* piece stated, “It has been supposed that the question ‘Who can paint the storm?’ could never be satisfactorily responded to, but we were certainly inclined to modify our views of the subject upon seeing a new painting of our renowned artist, Mark Harrison.”⁴¹ The critic went on to praise *Sunset on Mount Atwater*, one of Harrison’s most noted works. The critic, unwittingly or otherwise, omitted from his observations the fact that “the storm” had been painted many times before. Treatments of that subject had received praise in Hudson River School circles long before Harrison imitated them. Such was the case for nearly every piece of his work.

Harrison followed trends. *First House in Fond du Lac*, painted around 1869 from a sketch made fifteen years earlier, has evolved to become probably his most recognizable painting. The *Fond du Lac Journal* reported, “As a picture it is very well executed and to old settlers will be a valuable memento of their first resting place in this city.”⁴² The critic failed to mention that many artists were catering to the historical interests of residents of specific cities. Harrison’s *First House in Fond du Lac* resembles another painting, *First House in Madison*, both in title and in composition. Both paintings were produced in 1869, and the story or legend that they were reproduced from sketches rendered fifteen years earlier is also identical.⁴³

³⁷ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March, 11, 1950.

³⁸ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, February 8, 1850.

³⁹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, April 16, 1853.

⁴⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, February 25, 1867.

⁴¹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 20, 1867.

⁴² *Fond du Lac Journal*, October 28, 1869.

⁴³ Robert Nesbit, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), plate 20.

Harrison was neither an original nor an exceptional painter, but that fact is irrelevant. What mattered was that Harrison provided the people of the city of Fond du Lac with oil paintings about which they could feel good. His paintings added to the “civic pride” that newly forming and growing towns were desperately trying to attain. People settling in new territories and states wanted to be treated as equals to those in the East. They did not want to be thought of as behind the times. Harrison was formally educated, and, to the excited and anxious local eye, his paintings appeared to be the equal of those within the canon of Hudson River School greatness. It is no wonder he was so successful in Fond du Lac.

Mark Robert Harrison died over one hundred years ago. A 1946 *Fond du Lac Reporter* article claimed that, “many [of his works] are cherished in art museums in Europe, England and other parts of the world.”⁴⁴ It is safe to say, however, that since his death, his works have not gained any elevated status among the ranks of American artists. He has, however, remained a symbol of pride and culture in the Fond du Lac community. Nearly every decade since his death, someone from the community has celebrated his greatness and his impact on the city. Perhaps this is because every decade someone stumbles upon one of Harrison’s gifts to the city and is inspired to find out more about him.

Whether he realized the impact or not, Harrison left his most enduring mark on Fond du Lac when he died. He had no family to inherit his estate, and therefore he donated his residence and studio to his assistant, boarder, friend, and student, Edward G. Mascraft, to use while he was in Fond du Lac. Perhaps this was one way in which Harrison was able to keep an appreciation for his art alive in the city. Mascraft, by the way, not two years after Harrison’s death, was described by the local newspaper through means of a reference to Harrison. The February 2, 1896 edition of the *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth* read, “When Elijah was about to leave this earth, his servant Elisha, asked for a double portion of his spirit, and his request was granted. When Mark Harrison died, the people of Fond du Lac felt they had lost their artist. But it would seem as though a double portion of his artistic skill has fallen upon his former pupil, Edward Mascraft.”⁴⁵ The people of Fond du Lac were eager to celebrate their new artist. They still, after all, needed portraits and oil paintings to validate their middle class status.

⁴⁴ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, April 23, 1946.

⁴⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, February 21, 1896.

But Mascraft was not the only beneficiary named in Harrison's will. The week after Harrison's obituary ran in the December 7, 1894 issue of the *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, his last will and testament was printed in the paper. The headline read, "Fond du Lac's Artist Leaves Property to Benevolent and Public Improvement Purposes."⁴⁶ Upon his death, Harrison bequeathed almost everything he had to the city that had given him so much. He gave the Fond du Lac community \$1,500 for the purchase of a courthouse clock (it is rumored that the courthouse lawn was Harrison's favorite thinking spot); he provided \$500 toward the erection of a Civil War statue to honor the many Fond du Lac citizens, including Mascraft, who had served in the Grand Army of the Republic; and he donated money to many other charities, including a substantial sum to the children's home. All this was to say, "Fond du Lac, remember me." The statue, ironically, turned out to be one of the city's greatest scandals. Townspeople accused money managers of mishandling funds and presenting the city with nothing but a cheap tin statue that did not satisfy the veterans' conception of a proper war memorial. But the controversy kept Harrison's name in the papers, and, after all, Harrison had merely donated the money and could hardly be held responsible for any artistic insufficiencies of the statue that was selected eight years after his death. Every time the local newspaper ran a story about the infamous statue, Harrison was mentioned, but only in complimentary terms, for his gift. And finally, Harrison left the many paintings remaining at his studio to the city.

Harrison's name continued to find its way into the public eye when, every few years, one of Harrison's paintings was donated to the City of Fond du Lac or to a nearby community. The Oshkosh and Fond du Lac Public Libraries have received Harrison paintings as donations, as have the Fond du Lac Courthouse and the Fond du Lac County Historical Society (Galloway House), among others. With each auction or donation of Harrison's work, the newspaper published a very laudatory story about Harrison's career. For example, A. D. Sutherland, a Fond du Lac collector of Harrison's art, loaned his collection for an exhibit at the Wisconsin State Historical Society in 1950. The *Fond du Lac Reporter* coverage of that event referred to Harrison as "easily the finest landscape artist out of nineteenth century Wisconsin."⁴⁷ This statement seems justifiable, based on Harrison's career.

⁴⁶ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, December 14, 1894.

⁴⁷ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, March 11, 1950.

Harrison was an important figure in Fond du Lac's history. Just as the city celebrated his paintings while he was active, it continued to celebrate him years after his death. His successful business provided a product to meet the community's demand for "serious" art. His paintings give the town a sense of pride today, just as they did when they were created. Harrison's works and his donations are a constant reminder to the city of its proud history. He certainly does belong buried among the "greats" of the city, for he helped to define their conceptualization of Fond du Lac's image during his lifetime. Harrison, after all, provided those political and economic leaders who are now buried all about him with a very necessary part of the definition of their middle class existence. He provided them with art that they could appreciate, display, and celebrate.

Mark Harrison Paintings Mentioned in Wisconsin Newspapers

Title	Owner/Description/Location	Newspaper	Date
The Creation	Fond du Lac exhibition	Fond du Lac Journal	05.12.1853
Nativity of Christ	Fond du Lac exhibition	Fond du Lac Journal	05.12.1853
Milan Cathedral	Fond du Lac exhibition	Fond du Lac Journal	05.12.1853
The Crucifixion	Fond du Lac exhibition	Fond du Lac Journal	05.12.1853
The Thunderstorm	Johnson's Saloon, FdL	Fond du Lac Reporter	01.15.1852
Buffalo Chase	Johnson's Saloon, FdL	Fond du Lac Reporter Weekly	01.15.1852
The Soldier's Dream	Darling and Dodge Store	Oshkosh Weekly Courier	03.07.1855
Red Riding Hood	Darling and Dodge Store	Oshkosh Weekly Courier	03.07.1855
Castle Canon	L. Kurtz and Co.	Milwaukee Sentinel	06.23.1862
Sketch of Elkhart Lake	Dedicated Ladies of Wis.	Milwaukee Sentinel	08.17.1864
Elkhart Lake	A.T. Stewart, New York	Milwaukee Sentinel	02.20.1867
Castle Canon	Sold for \$10,000, Paris	Milwaukee Sentinel	02.25.1867
Mount Ogden	C.J. Pettibone, Milwaukee	Milwaukee Sentinel	02.25.1867
Valley of the Puebla	Chicago	Milwaukee Sentinel	04.26.1867
Sunset of Mt. Atwater	Mr. Atwater, Chicago	Milwaukee Sentinel	07.20.1867
Mount Ogden	Speaker Colfax	Milwaukee Sentinel	07.20.1867
Devil's Lake	Mr. F.A. Johnson	Milwaukee Sentinel	08.10.1868
Autumn in the Adirondacks	Milwaukee exhibition	Milwaukee Sentinel	04.01.1869
Mora Amid the Mts.	Milwaukee exhibition	Milwaukee Sentinel	04.01.1869
Mid the Mountains	Announcement	Milwaukee Sentinel	07.03.1869
First House in Fond du Lac	Announcement	Fond du Lac Reporter Weekly	07.03.1869
Echo Mountain	Hempstead and Co.	Milwaukee Sentinel	11.05.1869
Death of Abel	Canada	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.26.1870
Morn in the Mountains	California	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.26.1870
Storm in the Adirondacks	John A. Dutcher, Mil.	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.26.1870
Landscape in the Rockys	G.L. Dunlap, Chicago	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.26.1870
Sunset in the Mountains	A. McDonald, Esq., FdL	Milwaukee Sentinel	10.16.1871
The Burial of Minnehaha	Frodsham's, Milwaukee	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.24.1875
Yosemite Valley	Mention	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.24.1875
Triumph of Cleopatra	Exhibition	Milwaukee Sentinel	07.15.1879
Gathering of the Tribes	Exhibition	Milwaukee Sentinel	07.15.1879
The Prairie on Fire	Completed	FdL Daily Commonwealth	05.12.1884
Cromwell Portrait	Harrison Gallery	FdL Weekly Commonwealth	05.20.1887
John P. Hume Portrait	Harrison Gallery	FdL Weekly Commonwealth	05.20.1887
Cleopatra's Triumph	Description	FdL Weekly Commonwealth	04.10.1880
Mount of the Holy Cross	Description	FdL Weekly Commonwealth	04.10.1880
Scene in Selkirk Mts.	Mention	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.24.1875
Cromwell's Charge	Mention	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.24.1875
Wilson's Woods	Mention	Milwaukee Sentinel	03.24.1875
Heart of the Andes	Fond du Lac Public Library	Fond du Lac Daily Reporter	01.26.1906
Green Lake	Mention	FdL Commonwealth Reporter	02.20.1938
Evening Scene	Mention	FdL Commonwealth Reporter	02.20.1918
Indian Girl	Mrs. John Boyle	FdL Commonwealth Reporter	02.20.1928
Gathering at the Warpath	State Hist. Society of Wis.	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
The Deluge	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Jeptha's Rash Vow	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
The Angel Delivering Peter	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Grand Canal of Venice	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
St. Mark's Cathedral	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Venice	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Garden of Eden	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Destruction of Babylon	Mention	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	02.20.1928
Cain and Abel	Canadian Government	FdL Commonwlth Rprter	04.09.1936
Hiawatha	FdL Public Library	Fond du Lac Reporter	04.23.1946
Mount of the Holy Cross	Oshkosh Public Library	Oshkosh Northwestern	05.07.1948
24 Paintings	Sutherland Auction	Fond du Lac Reporter	11.21.1966

*Fifty-Foot Overshot Waterwheel,
Fairwater, Wisconsin*

A Grand Scheme on the Grand River: Fairwater's Fifty-Foot Waterwheel

Andy Trewyn

Quietly rusting away in the woods near Fairwater, Wisconsin, stands the nation's largest overshot waterwheel.¹ The waterwheel's dimensions are impressive: it is 50 feet high, ten feet wide, and it weighs 29 tons. The largest wheel ever produced by the Fitz Waterwheel Company, it is one of the most powerful waterwheels ever made.² Installed by Jess Laper in 1925 on the Grand River in Fairwater, Wisconsin, the wheel was once used to produce electricity to power three communities. The huge wheel stands idle today, a reminder of a different time—a boom time, the 1920s—when electricity was a brand-new industry, and a forward-looking thinker might seek to make a fortune playing a hunch. Fairwater's waterwheel is the story of one man's pursuit of a dream. Jess Laper's determination and commitment to this new industry culminated in the construction of a record-sized waterwheel, one that, sadly, operated for only a short time.

How did Fairwater end up with the nation's largest waterwheel? The geography of the area seems unremarkable. The visitor does not encounter dazzling waterfalls or whitewater rivers, the kinds of features one might expect to spawn a record-sized waterwheel, in this part of central Wisconsin. Examination of the historical evidence suggests that several contributing factors led to the construction of this wheel. One was the personality of Jess Laper. Another was the geography of his dam site. Finally, there was a phenomenon called “hydromania,” the dam-building craze that gained a grip on the nation, and especially Wisconsin, at this time.³

The story of Jess Laper and his gigantic waterwheel really began with Thomas Edison. Working in his New Jersey laboratory, the “Wizard of Menlo Park” and his assistants developed a practical electric light bulb in 1879.⁴ At thirty years of age, Edison already had several patents to his credit, and a number of them, including the multiplex telegraph machine and stock ticker, were related to the field of electricity. Thus, it came as no surprise when he directed his attention

¹ David R. Stidham, “Large Diameter Waterwheels of the U.S.” (March 1985), Unpublished manuscript in the collection of Margaret Laper. Mrs. Laper's archives, and her hospitality in granting access to them, were essential to the completion of this essay.

² *Old Mill News* (October, 1984), 12.

³ Forrest McDonald, *Let There Be Light: The Electric Utility Industry In Wisconsin—1881-1955* (Madison, Wisconsin: The American History Research Center, 1957), 111-112.

⁴ Bill Beck, *Transforming the Heartland: The History of Wisconsin Power & Light Company* (Madison, Wisconsin: The Wisconsin Power and Light Company, Inc., 1990), 17.

toward electric lighting. But it is somewhat surprising that he would turn to incandescent lighting when arc lighting, at this time, was more advanced.⁵

The reason Edison developed the incandescent bulb was that he was as astute a marketer as he was an inventor. He knew that arc lighting was by its nature restricted to large-space applications like streetlights. However, Edison had done his homework. By studying gas lighting companies' records, Edison found that 90% of their revenues came from residential and office lighting. This interior lighting was the market he pursued.

To effect his purpose, he avidly studied gas company generation, distribution, financing, pricing, and marketing. Everything about the electric system he designed, even the size of the lamps, was patterned on the experience of the gas companies.⁶

Edison had not only invented the incandescent bulb, but also the distribution system to feed it. Gearing up for a residential lighting market, as Edison did, created a model that small-scale utility pioneers like Jess Laper would later follow.

Edison began the operation of the world's first central electric generating station, the Pearl Street Station in lower Manhattan, in September 1882. Even the location of his test plant was carefully chosen by Edison with marketing in mind. The plant served the area that "included the leading financial houses, and Edison was thoroughly aware of the importance of convincing bankers of the commercial worth of his product."⁷

Edison's concept arrived in Wisconsin just three weeks later, when the world's first hydroelectric generating plant commenced operations in Appleton.⁸ Under a license from the Edison Electric Light Company, the plant began to deliver 12.5 kilowatts of power to local customers.⁹ H. J. Rogers was the man who built Appleton's hydroelectric plant. Rodgers was already using waterpower in his paper manufacturing plant. In his urgency to get the plant operating as quickly as possible, Rogers omitted several of the safety and reliability features of the earlier Edison plant, and as a result, he soon encountered technical difficulties. "The water wheels that turned the generator were connected to pulp beating machines, the speed of which varied greatly. Sometimes the voltage was so high that all the lamps in the system burned out,

⁵ McDonald, 12.

⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Beck, 17.

⁹ Beck 17; McDonald, 35.

and since lamps cost \$1.60 each, this was an expensive fault.”¹⁰ One can imagine the rising dismay felt by early power customers as yet another brownout occurred during the peak pulping times. Before long, however, the power supply became somewhat more reliable when the company erected a separate powerhouse where a technician regulated the flow of current. The operator still had to judge the intensity of the light merely using his eyes, because measuring instruments had yet to be developed. For all of its shortcomings, however, “the electric light was popularly judged a success, for although it often did not work, it was beautiful and it was novel.”¹¹ The seed of “hydromania” had been sown in Wisconsin’s fertile soil.

Following the successful harnessing of the Niagara Falls for electric power production in 1904, the seed germinated. Forrest McDonald first identified the phenomenon of “hydromania” and he explained the effect the Niagara Falls project had on the nation:

The achievement had about it a multitude of features that stimulated the popular imagination. Simply because it was at the massive and beautiful Niagara Falls, perhaps the best known falls in the world, the project was followed closely by the public. It was widely publicized for a decade, and Sunday supplement writers pictured the completion of the project as the dawn of a new era of free power. The size of the investment, the immediate financial success, and the magic name of J. Pierpont Morgan translated the free-power notion in the minds of many into a belief that any enterprising entrepreneur could emulate the project on a smaller scale.¹²

Unfortunately, the Niagara Falls project had some key advantages not shared by most of the Wisconsin hydro projects that soon followed. One factor was that there were customers in the electrochemical industry near the Niagara Falls site who were eager to purchase power.¹³ Wisconsin developers, in their rush to harness the power of the state’s rivers, at times overlooked the fact that a good site for a dam might not be near a market for power. Another Niagara factor was the steady, year-round flow of a large volume of water, and a third was the high “head” available at Niagara Falls. “Head” refers to the distance the water drops at a dam site, and it determined, along with the volume of water flowing past the site, the amount of power a site could potentially produce.

Typically, Wisconsin’s rivers did not share the latter two characteristics. Most of the state’s waterways, especially the westward flowing rivers, like the Grand River, provide “low-

¹⁰ McDonald, 35.

¹¹ McDonald, 37.

¹² McDonald, 112-113.

¹³ McDonald, 112.

head” sites.¹⁴ And, as a rule, Wisconsin’s waterways have a wide annual variance in volume of flow. Because of the state’s northerly climate, the low-water season comes in the winter, when the headwaters are frozen, instead of during the summer as in more southerly climes. This was particularly unfortunate for the state’s hydroelectric pioneers. Their market consisted almost solely of commercial and residential lighting customers, whose electrical usage peaked in the winter, when hours of darkness are longer.

Wisconsin was perhaps hit harder by the “delusion of free power,” offered in the form of flowing water, than were other parts of the nation. The state had an extensive history of putting its rivers to work in the lumber industry. Later, water power was used for other mechanical operations, notably flour milling and the Fox Valley’s paper industry. Wisconsin law had encouraged the development of dams for these purposes, and developers were eager to turn their experience to the production of power. Laper’s site on the Grand River in Fond du Lac County had originally been dammed to provide power for a flour mill.¹⁵

The first large-scale manifestation of hydromania in Wisconsin was Magnus Swenson’s project at Kilbourn, now known as the Wisconsin Dells. The Wisconsin River, which would earn the title of “the hardest working river in the nation,” appeared a good spot for a hydroelectric project at Kilbourn. There, the river is narrow, with solid, high, stone banks. The site, however, provided only a 22-foot head, and as experience would later show, the unit cost of developing these low-head sites was enormous, because the potential power yield was relatively low.¹⁶

Swenson had paid so much for the land and water rights at Kilbourn that the project was doomed from the start. At a purchase price of \$1.5 million, and with a plant that was originally capable of producing 6,000 kilowatts of electricity, the cost for just the site and water rights at Kilbourn was more than \$250 per kilowatt, or more than twice the cost of the completed plant at Niagara Falls.¹⁷

Swenson built the project almost entirely on speculation, assuming he could readily sell power to customers in Madison through the Madison Gas and Electric Company (MG&E). But as construction neared completion, it became apparent that MG&E would not be interested in

¹⁴ McDonald, 114.

¹⁵ *Markesan Herald*, n.d. All references to *Markesan Herald* refer to newspaper clippings in the Laper collection.

¹⁶ McDonald, 142.

¹⁷ McDonald, 141-2. Directors meeting, February 1906, minute book, Southern Wisconsin Power Company, WP&L Records Center.

purchasing the power from Kilbourn, since they were already inexpensively generating as much power as they needed. The president of The Milwaukee Electric Railroad and Light Company, John I. Beggs, realized that he was the only customer willing to buy power from Swenson, and having him thus cornered, got it for almost nothing. “Beggs’ terms gave the company enough to stay out of receivership, and no more.”¹⁸ The 30-year contract signed by Beggs and Swenson would pay \$15,000 per month for the entire production capacity of the Kilbourn plant. At this rate, the company could pay little more than the interest on its outstanding debt. Once stockholders got wind of the deal and realized that the stock would be virtually worthless for 30 years, the price of stock fell dramatically. In 1916, Beggs bought up the stock for a song, paid himself a large salary as “president, treasurer, and secretary of the company, and sold the company a year later for a profit.”¹⁹

Although the Kilbourn project was a technological breakthrough, and in later years became an important power producer for Wisconsin Power and Light, at the time it was an economic disaster. Ironically, this did not dampen the spirit of Wisconsin’s hydroelectric pioneers; it seemed to have the opposite effect, fueling hydromania all the more.

It is likely that this hydroelectric fever, “the delusion of free power,” is partly what drove Jess Laper to squeeze every last possible kilowatt from the small flowage that crossed his site, which is really what building the fifty-foot wheel allowed him to do.²⁰

Laper’s personality also contributed to the development of his dam site. Laper was an entrepreneur who was involved in a variety of enterprises. His parents, John and Mary Laper, were influential people in Fairwater who owned considerable property in the area, and it was John Laper who traded twenty horses for the mill site where Jess built his power plant. Even more influential were the parents of the woman Jess Laper married, Nellie Abercrombie. Her father had been Fairwater’s first village president.²¹ Having such influential family ties undoubtedly helped Laper secure financial backing for his business ventures.

Jess and Nellie Laper were regarded by the local newspaper, *The Brandon Times*, as socialites. Their names appeared frequently in the social column of the paper, which recounted the lifestyle of the couple in numerous entries: “J. W. Laper purchased a cottage on Little Green

¹⁸ Beck, 35.

¹⁹ McDonald, 145. Directors and stockholders meetings, July 1915 to July 30, 1917, Southern Wisconsin Power Co.

²⁰ McDonald, 111.

²¹ *Markesan Herald*, n.d.

Lake,” and “The Lapers and Cards motored to Indianapolis for the races this weekend.”²² Still other entries kept the public informed of the whereabouts, activities, and health of the couple. According to Jess Laper’s son Florian, who now lives in Ripon, another reason for his father’s social visibility stemmed directly from his electrical business. Jess Laper personally visited everyone in town on a monthly basis for the purpose of reading their meters.²³

Laper was an habitual entrepreneur. Besides the power company, he was involved in several other enterprises. One was an automobile agency, established in 1916.²⁴ Like electricity, the automobile industry was relatively new. Both businesses were on the cutting edge of early twentieth-century technology. Laper also operated a dance pavilion near the site of the water-wheel. Each week from Memorial Day through Labor Day, a dance would be held at the large 60- by 90-foot pavilion. Actor Spencer Tracey, then a Ripon College student, attended some of these dances. “He was one of the rowdy ones,” later remembered Florian Laper, who was twelve at the time.²⁵ Other Laper business ventures at the time included a feed mill and several farms.

But the electric business was Laper’s mainstay. He first dabbled in the production of electricity through the use of wind power, and according to Florian Laper, designed and sold some wind-powered generating plants.²⁶ But once Laper owned a dam and water rights, it was logical that he would turn them toward the production of electricity, especially since the industry leaders viewed water as the future source of power for generating electricity.

The mill site which Laper owned had originally been developed by the “firm of Dakin and Lathrop [who] erected a flour mill on the Grand River in 1847.” The town essentially grew up around the mill, with a store and a sawmill commencing operations in the same year.²⁷

Laper founded his power company on the mill site in 1912. The *Brandon Times* noted progress on the plant on July 11, 1912, “J. W. Laper is putting up the telegraph poles this weekend, for the electric light system,” and on July 18, 1912, “Mr. Laper is going right on with the light plant and expects to have it ready for lighting in the near future. It will be a fine thing for

²² *Brandon Times*, July 9, 1924; May 28, 1925.

²³ Florian Laper Interview, September 1995.

²⁴ *Markesan Herald*, n.d.

²⁵ *Oshkosh (Wisconsin) Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

²⁶ Florian Laper Interview, September 1995.

²⁷ *Markesan Herald*, n.d..

our town.” The community seemed anxious to step into the age of electric lighting. The plant began to supply electricity on October 22, 1912.²⁸

Laper originally generated power using the same five-foot waterwheel that had powered the flour mill. In the early days, he supplied the town with thirty-two-volt, direct current power.²⁹ By producing direct current, he could use the waterwheel during the day to charge a series of batteries. Because lighting was the only use for the power at this time, no current was drawn during the daytime. The current owner, Mrs. Margaret Laper, whose husband was a cousin of Florian Laper, described the procedure for supplying power in those days. At dusk, the power would be turned on. There was a piano located in the electric plant for the entertainment of the attendant. At times, the scene at the plant would become quite merry. At 10:30 or 11:00 p.m., the attendant would blink the power three times, indicating that it would soon be turned off.

The new plant was a success, and almost immediately demand for electricity began to increase. At the same time, Laper was trying to expand his service area to include the towns of Brandon and Alto. Laper soon discovered that the five-foot waterwheel could not produce enough power to meet the growing demand.

In 1914, Laper switched to alternating current.³⁰ The advantage of alternating current was that it could be produced at very high voltages, for efficient transmission to the outlying towns of Brandon and Alto, and then transformed into usable voltage there. Simultaneously, he attempted to increase the plant’s power output by using diesel power to turn the generator. Two different engines, first a “Ven Severin single cylinder semi-diesel, and then a Fairbanks-Morse two-cylinder diesel,” were tried.³¹ Even when the diesel engines were supplemented by the power from the five-foot wheel, the electrical demand could not be met. New labor saving appliances were appearing regularly, and it was inevitable that the demand for power would continue to grow. Clearly, a more powerful source would have to be found.

In 1922, a setback occurred that almost devastated the fledgling utility. February 22, 1922 was a day of infamy in Wisconsin utility history. On this date, a terrible ice storm hit South-central Wisconsin. The storm damage was covered extensively in the *Brandon Times*.

²⁸ Paula Delfeld, *Appleton Post-Crescent*, n.d. Citations of Delfeld refer to a newspaper clipping, ca 1968-70.

²⁹ Florian Laper Interview, September 1995.

³⁰ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

³¹ Delfeld.

Between Brandon and Waupun over 50 telephone poles are reported down, and a mile or so of poles are reported laying on the ground west of the village, [the line to the fairwater power plant] and from all reports it will be some time until repairs on the telephone lines and electric wires can be made.

A week later, on March 2, 1922, the *Brandon Times* described the progress being made at restoring electricity:

About thirty men have been kept busy on the electric system, and equally as many on the telephone systems...but up to going to press with the *Times* today, we are still without any electric light or telephone service. Damage as nearly as it can be estimated at present will amount to between \$6,000 and \$7,000.³²

In the Fairwater Department of the same issue of the newspaper was this item:

J. W. Laper has certainly done some tall hustling to get fixed up so we have lights in the dwellings. We surely appreciate this as it is no fun plundering along, by candle light, when you are used to electricity.

The tone of the articles indicates that people could hardly stand the inconvenience of a power outage. Such a response demonstrates the tremendous impact electricity had, because only ten years had passed since Laper started operating his plant, and Brandon had only been electrified for eight years.

Restoration of power was difficult because the ground was frozen, and new poles could not be set until the spring thaw. But the resourceful Laper rounded up two-by-fours and two-by-sixes and bolted them to pole stumps and fence posts to suspend the lines temporarily. Thus his business continued with only a minor interruption.³³

During this period, Laper was still wrestling with the problem of how to get more power production out of his plant. Essentially, his present hydroelectric arrangement had two limitations. One was the insufficient, six-foot head provided by his dam, and the other was the insufficient volume of water flowing in the Grand River at his site. There was nothing Laper could do, save praying for rain, to increase the amount of water flowing in the river. With a capital investment, however, he could increase the head, and thus utilize a larger waterwheel to produce more power.

³² *Brandon Times*, March 2, 1922.

³³ Margaret Laper Interview, November 1994.

In 1921, Laper decided to go ahead with the fifty-foot waterwheel, encouraged by a Fairwater village improvement. “The Fairwater village board approved the installation of 25 street lights, 100 watt, at a flat rate of \$20 per light per year. They were lit from dusk to 11:30 p.m.”³⁴ The promise of steady revenue and increased power consumption prompted Laper to go ahead with his plan.

The decision to build the fifty-foot waterwheel represented an incredible investment of money, time, and effort. First of all, Laper had to provide sufficient head for the waterwheel. In order to establish this, the waterwheel had to be built a distance of some fifteen hundred feet downstream from the millpond and dam. At this point, there would be a fifty-foot drop from the surface of the millpond to the top to the tail race, where the water flowed away. This was the amount of head required to utilize a fifty-foot waterwheel.

A flume was required to get the water from the millpond to the wheel, and building the fifteen-hundred-foot pipeline from the dam to the waterwheel was a major construction effort in and of itself. The pipe had a three-foot inside diameter.³⁵ It was constructed by a technique used for wooden silos of the day. Tongue-and-groove lumber staves were bound with iron hoops, which were spaced one foot apart.³⁶ The construction technique is not unlike that of a wooden barrel.

Florian Laper recalled a brief period in the construction when the wooden flume was completed, but not yet in use.

Parts of the wooden flume were suspended above ground on a trestle. A merry-go-round and dance pavilion on a wooded site near the location of the waterwheel was a favorite spot for social gatherings. I was one of the young boys who accepted a challenge to crawl through the one-half mile of pipe. It was pitch black in the wooden pipe, and I wanted to turn back, but with two companies close behind, there was no way to get out of that dungeon except by keeping crawling straight ahead.³⁷

When the flume was completed, there was only a one-foot drop from the surface of the water in the millpond to the top of the waterwheel, yet the flume delivered the pond’s water to the wheel at the impressive rate of 1,000 cubic feet per minute.³⁸

³⁴ *Markesan Herald*, n.d.

³⁵ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

³⁶ Delfeld.

³⁷ Elaine Reetz, *Come Back in Time*, v. II: *Business and Commerce* (Princeton, Wisconsin: Fox River Publishing Co., 1982). 83-86.

³⁸ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

In order to make a fairly straight shot from the millpond to the waterwheel site, part of the conduit had to be suspended on a trestle. In some places the pipeline was eight to ten feet above the ground. In other areas, excavation was necessary to clear a path for the line, and it was accomplished through the use of horse-power and a steam dragline.³⁹ The dragline was shipped to Fairwater by rail for the operation. The *Brandon Times* noted its arrival without fanfare in the October 16, 1924 edition with a one-line blurb, “Dragline unloaded in Fairwater for electric company dredging.” The trestle and the excavations both added to the cost and complexity of building the flume.

By placing his waterwheel 1,500 feet downstream from the dam, Laper gained the additional head he needed to increase his power production. The problem of insufficient water volume still remained, and since Laper could not change this, his challenge was to utilize the water he did have as efficiently as possible. Laper’s solution was to use the waterwheel instead of some sort of turbine apparatus, because the waterwheel would use the small volume of water at utmost efficiency.

Laper’s waterwheel was designed and built by the Fitz Waterwheel Company of Hanover, Pennsylvania.⁴⁰ Parts of the wheel were built in Pennsylvania and shipped disassembled via railroad to Fairwater. The *Brandon Times* noted its arrival matter-of-factly in the April 9, 1925 edition, “The water wheel for the new plant at the Electric Co. had been unloaded from the car on track here and is being installed in the new plant here, which is nearing completion.”

Before assembly could occur, the immense foundation for the wheel had to be placed. Building it was another major undertaking. The construction of the two-foot-thick concrete walls that supported the weight of the wheel involved the placement of a great deal of concrete. Conservatively estimated, the foundation contains several hundred cubic yards of concrete.

The waterwheel, because of its great weight and size, had to be assembled at the site. It was put together with hot rivets. Florian Laper was impressed with the construction technique. He remembered “watching a man heat a metal rivet with a forge, grab it with a tong [sic] and throw it 50 feet up to another man who would catch it with a tong, place it in a hole, and bind it together using a hammer.”⁴¹ At least one worker was injured during this process. The incident was tersely reported in the *Brandon Times* on April 21, 1925: “E. C. Fenske had the misfortune

³⁹ *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

⁴⁰ *Old Mill News* (October 1984).

⁴¹ *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

to fall from a scaffold at the electric plant last week which resulted in a badly bruised foot so he is unable to be around.”

During the summer of 1925 the big wheel was finally completed. When the wheel was finished, it “was so well balanced, it could be turned by the pressure of a garden hose.”⁴² When operating at capacity, it produced about 140 horsepower.⁴³ The wheel turned at a very slow rate to conserve the limited water available in the millpond. In operation, the wheel turned two-and-a-half revolutions per minute. Jess Laper elaborated on this. “If you looked at the wheel when it was in operation, it barely moved, for its top speed was only two and a half turns a minute. Yet if you looked at the surface over which the water flowed, it traveled so fast it was a blur—almost seven feet a second.”⁴⁴

The wheel was connected to the generator by a series of huge gears. By the time the rotation of the wheel reached the generator, it was converted from two-and-a-half revolutions per minute to twelve thousand revolutions per minute. The generator that the wheel turned at this rate produced about 75 kilowatts of electricity.⁴⁵

While operating, tremendous forces were exerted on the components of the wheel. For example, seven tons of water were suspended on the face of the wheel. This meant that in addition to the 29-ton dry weight of the wheel, seven more tons were suspended on the nine-inch diameter axle that supported the works. “The weight of the water put a pressure of more than 40 tons on the gear teeth that had to speed up the generator to produce the quantity of electricity needed to supply the consumers.”⁴⁶

The construction of the fifty-foot waterwheel required a considerable capital investment. Florian Laper estimated that the construction and installation of the waterwheel itself and the building that housed it cost \$10,000.⁴⁷ Laper also had a considerable sum invested in a distribution network that now extended to Fairwater and the Villages of Brandon and Alto. Even though the project was expensive, it still had the potential to be profitable. Laper’s waterwheel was capable of producing approximately seventy-five kilowatts of electricity. If he could operate the wheel an average of ten hours per day, a total of 750 kilowatt-hours would be available for

⁴² *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 10, 1974.

⁴³ Stidham.

⁴⁴ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

⁴⁵ Reetz, 84; *Old Mill News* (October 1984); Florian Laper Interview, September 1995.

⁴⁶ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

⁴⁷ Reetz, 83.

daily customer use. Since Laper charged sixteen cents per kilowatt-hour, the potential revenues amounted to \$120 per day, or \$3,600 per month. Obviously, the operation could have returned a handsome profit on the money invested.

Sadly, as often seemed to be the case for Wisconsin's hydroelectric pioneers, things were not quite that simple. The gears and shaft of the fifty-foot wheel simply could not take the strain that was exerted upon them. In winter, problems were compounded when spray from the water froze onto the working parts of the wheel, adding still more weight. After just six months of operation, disaster struck. Florian Laper relates the story.

One night, Dad was up on the ladder, oiling the first set of gears. Just as he was doing so, he saw something drop. One of the cogs of a pinion which operated against the largest gear had broken off, and so Jess jumped down eight feet and ran for the shut off chain.⁴⁸

In order to keep the flume from bursting, Laper had to shut off the water supply gradually. Before the water was completely turned off, the missing cog came around to meet the gear. The large gear split in half and part of it dropped down to the floor. Freed from driving the generator, the wheel began to "spin so fast it became a blur." Jess Laper said the whole building began to shake, and he was afraid the huge wheel would "come loose of the shaft and spin off into the woods."⁴⁹

A new gear was ordered to repair the wheel. When Laper had it installed, he noticed that the nine-inch diameter, five-ton, steel shaft had become twisted one-eighth turn out of line. A new shaft was sent to the plant, but it was impossible to lift the twenty-nine-ton wheel and support it while a new shaft was installed.⁵⁰ This event marked the demise of the wheel's working life. After only six months of operation, it was never used again.

The idea of producing electricity, however, was not abandoned. Laper had only made a \$5,000 down payment on the wheel, and he refused to pay the balance of the price until problems with it could be corrected. Apparently, the Fitz Company did not think that the wheel could be fixed either. They eventually replaced it with a twenty-foot turbine that produced as much power as the waterwheel.⁵¹ According to Florian Laper,

⁴⁸ *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

⁴⁹ *Oshkosh Daily Northwestern*, September 10, 1974.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹ *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

There was quite a hassle about this. The wheel was designed wrong and the shaft was made of the wrong kind of steel. They furnished new shafts, but the wheel was so enormous, it was nearly impossible, with the equipment available, to hold the twenty-nine-ton wheel while a ten-ton shaft was being installed. So they dickered back and forth. It never came to a lawsuit or anything, but after six months, the company furnished a turbine and the huge wheel was abandoned.⁵²

During the short time that the wheel operated, Laper sold his distribution rights to the Wisconsin Power and Light Company (WP&L). In this transaction, Laper made a considerable profit. During 1925, Wisconsin Power and Light was in the midst of a large-scale expansion program, buying up small distribution systems, often at inflated prices.⁵³ In 1925, WP&L acquired three municipal plants and 31 small companies. The trend in the electrical utility industry was toward consolidation, and the sun was setting on small-time operators like Jess Laper. In the land rush to expand their territory from 1917 through 1929, “Power and Light crowded more acquisitions, mergers, and consolidations into a dozen years than a dozen ordinary corporations experience in a century.”⁵⁴ By the time he sold out, WP&L already owned the territory surrounding Laper’s service area of Brandon, Fairwater, and Alto.⁵⁵

The contract for the sale of Laper’s distribution rights was signed on October 2, 1925, and it specified that Laper would receive “Forty-Two Thousand Dollars, payable in preferred stock of the Wisconsin Power and Light Company at par” in return for his entire distribution system. The contract also specified that Laper would enter employment with WP&L “for a period of seven years to have the supervision” of the distribution system. He was paid \$450 per month for this service.⁵⁶

Laper retained ownership of the waterwheel and generator, and WP&L agreed to purchase the power he produced for the next twenty years at a rate of two cents per kilowatt hour. Although this was considerably less than Laper had charged his customers, it was closer to what it cost WP&L to produce power. Shortly after buying Laper’s distribution system, WP&L

⁵² Delfeld.

⁵³ Lamont K. Richardson, *Wisconsin R.E.A.: The Struggle to Extend Electricity to Rural Wisconsin, 1933-1955* (Madison: U. W. Experiment Station, College of Agriculture, 1961), 9; McDonald, 223.

⁵⁴ McDonald, 232, 239.

⁵⁵ *Brandon Times*, October 8, 1925.

⁵⁶ Contract between J. W. Laper and WP&L signed October 2, 1925, Wisconsin Power and Light Company, Records Department.

standardized its rates. Each of the many small utilities WP&L had acquired had its own rate schedule, and for the sake of simplicity WP&L made the rate uniform across its entire territory. Because of economy of scale, WP&L was able to reduce the rate considerably from what Laper had charged, \$16 for 100 kilowatt-hours, to \$5.80 for 100 kilowatt-hours.⁵⁷ The power consumers of Brandon, Alto, and Fairwater definitely benefited from the WP&L buyout and rate standardization.

As time wore on, the revenues Laper received from power sales decreased. During the 1930s, the marshes upstream from the Fairwater millpond were drained, and Laper's water supply became even less reliable. The water came down in the spring faster than it could possibly be used, and after that there wasn't enough water.⁵⁸ As a result, Laper was producing less and less power.

When Laper's contract expired in 1945, his electric plant had run its course. The wooden flume was dismantled, and its lumber was used to build a barn. The iron hoops were straightened out and used to reinforce concrete.⁵⁹ The turbine was sold and shipped to Jackson Hole, Wyoming, where there was another site with sufficient head to power it.⁶⁰

Jess Laper had filled a small but important niche in the process of bringing electricity to Wisconsin. In 1907, five years before Laper started to produce power, one in twelve Wisconsin homes received electricity from a central generating plant. In the same year, 151 cities and villages in the state had central station service, and of those, only 28 had 24-hour service. Of the 151 central stations in Wisconsin in 1907, 31 were powered exclusively by water.⁶¹ As long as demand for electricity was limited to lighting applications, small operators like Jess Laper could meet their customers' needs. But by the mid-1920s, as new applications for electricity continued to be found, customer demand outgrew the small operations, and the giant utility companies of today began to take over. But it was the small operators who had given the state its first taste of electricity and created a market for large utilities to serve.

The big waterwheel still stands, much as it did in 1926 when it ceased to operate. Because of Jess Laper's eye for the future and his interest in electricity, because of the geographical obstacles he had to overcome, and because of "hydromania," the small town of

⁵⁷ Bills Ledger of Fairwater Electric Co. WP&L Records Center; McDonald, 241.

⁵⁸ Florian Laper Interview, September 1995.

⁵⁹ *Milwaukee Sentinel*, March 13, 1955.

⁶⁰ *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 7, 1990.

⁶¹ McDonald, 98, 100.

Fairwater gained a historic landmark. What does the future hold in store for the waterwheel?

The Laper family still hopes, as do others, that the site might be restored as a park or historic site.

As interest grows in the early industrial history of Wisconsin, perhaps this will occur.

Residence and Cheese Factory of Chester Hazen
Springvale, Fond du Lac County
(From 1874 Plat Book)

The Cheese Industry in Fond du Lac County, 1844-1925

Jennifer Wachter

Wisconsin is considered America's Dairyland, and the State itself chooses to use this appellation on its vehicle license plates. While California may have surpassed Wisconsin in volume of milk production, in the field of cheese manufacture Wisconsin continues to reign unchallenged as the country's largest producer. The importance of cheese to Wisconsin may be inferred from the statement in the *State of Wisconsin Blue Book 1999-2000* that the first established cheese factory in the state was one of the ten events that shaped Wisconsin's development.¹ Much of this cheesemaking history started in or near Fond du Lac County. The industry has had a great impact on the county and the surrounding areas, an impact that can still be seen every day in the lives of the county's citizens as evidenced by the many dairy farms and cheese factories that dot the area.

Cheesemaking has a very long history, longer than that of any other familiar processed food, except perhaps for butter and beer. The history of cheese began with the domestication of hoofed animals: sheep, horses, goats, and, of course, cows. The cow became the primary source of milk used for cheese production in Wisconsin.

Milk was perishable without refrigeration; it could not be stored safely for long periods. Cheese had a much longer shelf life, and many types did not require refrigeration. Cheese almost certainly was first produced by accident. It is likely that the first cheeses resulted from the use of an early form of "canteen" made from the stomach of an animal. Milk stored in such a container, one that had not been completely dried, led to enzymes remaining in the stomach lining acting upon the milk, causing the milk to curd and form cheese.² Who was the courageous and hungry person who first decided to taste this curd?

Records on clay tablets from 2000 B.C. suggest that ancient people of the Fertile Crescent were familiar with a cheese product.³ Europeans may have received cheese before they domesticated animals, as cheese was a commodity used in trading. Cheesemaking spread throughout the Middle East to Europe, and from there it eventually came to the New World.⁴

¹ State of Wisconsin, *Blue Book 1999-2000*. Joint Committee on Legislative Organization, Wisconsin Legislature, W. L. Wendorff, *Backgrounds of the Wisconsin Cheese Industry*, Pamphlet No. 6-89A (Madison, Wisconsin: State Department of Agriculture, 1960).

³ Jerry Apps, *Cheese: The Making of a Wisconsin Tradition* (Amherst, Wisconsin: Palmer Pub., 1998), 7.

⁴ Wendorff, 7.

Early cheese manufacture invariably took place on a farm. The first United States cheese factory located on a site other than the owner's farm was established in 1850 by Jesse Williams, near Rome, New York. Williams used the milk from 65 cows to produce 25,000 pounds of cheese a year.⁵ In Wisconsin, cheesemaking as a farm industry began almost as soon as the first permanent settlers arrived in the area. Many of the early English-speaking settlers to Wisconsin came west from New England and New York. New York had begun developing a flourishing cheese industry in the early part of the nineteenth century. The New Yorkers brought cattle that were used as draft animals but whose secondary value was milk production..⁶

But it was a family from Ohio that pioneered the cheese industry in Wisconsin. Mrs. Anne Pickett started the first home cheese factory in Wisconsin in Lake Mills (Jefferson County), Wisconsin.⁷ The Pickett family moved to Wisconsin from Litchfield, Ohio, during the 1830s. Because the open prairie and marshes they found lent themselves to the raising of livestock, the Pickett family began dairy farming. Mrs. Pickett made cheese and butter for her own family's use, while production beyond the family's own needs was sold or traded to others in the territory. Soon the demands of an increasing population in the Wisconsin Territory grew beyond what the Pickett herd could supply. To keep up, the Picketts needed additional cows. Rather than purchase the cows, Mrs. Pickett proposed that her neighbors bring their cows to her farm for milking. In turn, Mrs. Pickett made their milk into butter and cheese. Mrs. Pickett's kitchen in her log cabin became the first Wisconsin home cheese factory. This procedure continued until 1845, when the level of production and demand at last grew too large for her kitchen.⁸

Many of the earliest farmers in Wisconsin planted wheat. As the years went by, however, wheat farming was found to be unreliable. Successful grain crops proved to be uncertain due to rapidly decreasing soil fertility and because growing wheat required warm weather with adequate rainfall.⁹ If too much rain fell, the crop rotted. Dairy farming seemed a more reliable alternative, if a means could be found to keep the milk from spoiling. To this problem, the obvious solution was to transform milk into cheese. Milk production intended for consumption in its original form did not increase until the introduction of the icebox and refrigerated railroad cars on a wide-

⁵ Apps, 11.

⁶ Wendorff, 20.

⁷ Wendorff, 13.

⁸ Wendorff, 14.

⁹ Apps, 20.

scale in the 1870s. Therefore, much of the milk produced in nineteenth-century Wisconsin was intended for the manufacture of cheese and butter.

One of the earliest cheese producers in Fond du Lac County was Chester Hazen. Members of the Hazen family were among the first settlers of Springvale Township. The nine Hazen brothers and their mother, natives of Massachusetts, came to Fond du Lac County in 1844. At this time Chester Hazen set up a farm near Ladoga. He bought 20 cows and used their milk for cheese production. This started Chester Hazen on a cheesemaking path that he would follow for over 30 years.¹⁰

In 1864, Hazen built the first cheese factory in Wisconsin on land that was not part of his Ladoga farmstead. Across the United States, a debate over industrialization of the cheesemaking process had been going on for some time. Most residents were not convinced that cheese could be made on such a large scale, using the milk of cows from different farms. Up to that time, it had always been made in the home on the farm where the milk was produced.¹¹

Chester Hazen was thought to be both courageous and insane for his decision to build and run a cheese factory. Because of this, his factory became known as “Hazen’s Folly.” Hazen’s critics believed it would be hard to get a good quality cheese from such a large-scale operation, since the cheese would be made with milk from different herds that presumably had been fed different blends of feed. But by the end of Hazen’s first year in business, his factory was a success, and he was using the milk from over 300 cows.¹² His enterprise became so prosperous that at one time it was receiving milk produced by more than 1000 cows. Hazen was the first to ship cheese out of state in railcars, in 1870, and in 1878, he won first prize for his cheese at the International Dairy Fair in New York. Hazen had the pride of place in demonstrating that commercial dairying could be practiced successfully in Wisconsin, and he did so while making Fond du Lac County and Wisconsin famous for the finest quality cheese in the United States.¹³

There were, of course, other cheese producers in Wisconsin besides Chester Hazen. In 1858, John J. Smith began making cheese in Sheboygan County, and the next year his brother, Hiram, also started making cheese. The cheesemaking fever spread. By 1875 there were 45 factories producing two million pounds of cheese in Sheboygan County. By 1900 there were

¹⁰ Melvin News Service, Sunday Feature, Fond du Lac, undated, unidentified newspaper, Fond du Lac County Historical Society Collection.

¹¹ Melvin News Service, 2.

¹² Melvin News Service, 3.

¹³ N. Peters, *Hazen cheese factory—125 years ago*, 1989. Unpublished manuscript, Fond du Lac Public Library.

almost 100 factories in that county, producing eight million pounds of cheese. Because of this, Plymouth, Wisconsin, located in central Sheboygan County, came to be known as the Cheese Factory Capital of the World. The first dairy board was established there in 1872, while in the 1960s, the National Cheese Exchange was located in Plymouth. Whatever was the price of cheese in Plymouth became the price of cheese nationwide.¹⁴

For a cheese factory to become successful, it needed to be properly located. The site on which the factory was placed required a good water supply, most often obtained from a spring. Most factories were placed along a hillside so their wastes would flow downhill away from the site. In the nineteenth century, wood was used for fuel, and oil or kerosene provided light from lamps. Making cheese was a tedious job and required a great deal of manual labor. Compared to butter, cheesemaking also required more knowledge and skill. Because of the variables in the milk supply, cheesemaking required the judgment of a fine cook. For this reason, many of the early cheesemakers were women.¹⁵

Cheesemaking, as all industries, has changed over time because of mechanization. In Wisconsin, local craftsmen manufactured much of the equipment and utensils used in the first cheese factories. The cheese hoop was used to shape the cheese, either round or square. The hoop resembled a tin canister with an expandable band of wood or metal on the sides and a separate bottom. By taking the bottom or top piece off the hoop, the hoops could be stacked to make bigger rounds of cheese. In the early days, cheese was usually made in 70- to 80-pound rounds. Cheese that was shipped overseas often weighed 140 to 150 pounds. Some factories even made 700-pound or larger cheese rounds. During World War I, the 76-pound round cheddar became popular, because the round cheese had fewer edges to be damaged in shipping.¹⁶

In the period between 1870 and 1890, Wisconsin cheese processors began to seek ways to market their cheese out of state. At first, they faced a problem created by competitors who sought to mimic Wisconsin cheeses. Many cheesemakers in Wisconsin were disadvantaged because the State did not require a brand or stamp on its cheese products. This made it possible for unscrupulous dealers to market their cheese under fictitious grades and brands. The organ-

¹⁴ O. Banton, "Wisconsin cheese making 'just growed' until the state output now leads the nation," *Milwaukee Sentinel*, July 1937, 5.

¹⁵ S. M. Babcock, *The cheese industry: Its development and possibilities in Wisconsin* (University of Wisconsin Agricultural Experiment Station, Research Bulletin No. 60), Madison, Wisconsin, 1897.

¹⁶ Wendorff, 15.

ization of the Wisconsin Dairyman's Association in 1872 relieved cheesemakers of this problem by establishing standards and regulations for the dairy industry.

Another problem that cheesemakers faced was that people in much of the country were not eager to buy cheese in the 30- to 70-pound blocks or rounds that were standard in Wisconsin cheese factories. To help deal with this marketing difficulty, Peter Balts of Sheboygan had a hoop made for a 20-pound cheese form, a new standard that came to be called the "daisy" because of its shape and size. Following this development, Wisconsin cheese soon became popular across the nation. During the 1930s, manufacturers turned to even smaller packages for cheese, partly due to the effects of the Great Depression on consumers, but also due to changes in the ways in which Americans preferred to purchase groceries. Consumers preferred one-, two-, and five-pound loaves of cheese. These smaller packages remain the standard that consumers see in stores today, as most of the population does not have the need or storage capacity for a 70-pound block of cheese in their homes.¹⁷

The actual process of making cheese was to take the curdled milk and place or pack it into the cheese hoops. The hoops were then set into a press and the mass of curd was compressed until all of the whey was squeezed out. The whey was then transferred to outdoor vats where the farmers who had sold their milk to the factories could collect it. The farmers used the whey to feed their livestock. By recycling the whey, the typical farmer believed that he was getting more value for his milk. The cheese in the hoops was then placed on shelves to age until it was ready for sale. Each type of cheese required a different amount of aging time before it could be sold.

To heat water for cleaning the equipment, a wood stove or water tank with a heater was needed. This stove also provided heat for the factory during the winter months. Later, steam boilers were used for heating and steam engines drove the pumps. Every factory had "self-heating" vats in which to make the cheese. The tinned steel vat had an outer jacket for the heated water.¹⁸

Over time, cheesemaking methods changed because of technological developments in the industry that helped produce a more uniform and consistently high quality product. In 1867, Robert McAdam of New York introduced the "cheddar" method. This was the matting and

¹⁷ Wendorff, 16.

¹⁸ Peters, 2.

milking process for American cheese that reduced labor and improved quality. In 1873, the first refrigerated railroad car service was established in Wisconsin, which enabled producers to ship perishable cheeses greater distances.

As cheese factories popped up around the country, they replaced the traditional dairy farmer's role of providing an increasingly popular staple for a growing population's diet. Specialization meant that the maker of the cheese now only had to worry about producing cheese, undistracted by other farm work. The factory system meant superior quality, greater uniformity, higher prices for producers, and larger wholesale savings for merchants.

One difficulty with the early factory system was the problem of keeping milk from becoming sour prior to its transformation into cheese. Since milk had to be kept cold to remain usable for very long, many people thought that the milk would go bad because it could not be transported rapidly enough to the factory to initiate the cheesemaking process.

A second concern of the factory owners was that, during the winter, the milk supply available to the factories decreased. This occurred because dairy farmers often did not store enough hay or other feeds to keep all of their animals alive through the winter. Herds typically were thinned in the autumn as part of the herd was slaughtered for food. The result was that some cheese factories could produce cheese only during the four to five months out of the year known as the "flush" season. Factory owners certainly wanted to produce during twelve months of the year, but this would require the farmers to store more feed and build larger barns to keep their herds intact. This proposition was expensive for the farmers. The solution to this problem was the invention of the silo in 1877, a much more efficient and less expensive container in which to store food for dairy cattle over the winter months. The cheese factory, the refrigerated railroad car, and the complementary introduction of the silo completed the dairy revolution and the industrialization of cheesemaking in Wisconsin.¹⁹

In addition to technology, training and education played major roles in the growth of the cheese industry. The development of the University of Wisconsin Agricultural School also had an impact on the development of cheese making in Fond du Lac County and in Wisconsin. In 1866, the University of Wisconsin began an agricultural instructional program at its Madison campus.²⁰ At first, farmers were not happy with this school because the curriculum was based on

¹⁹ Norman Risjord, *Wisconsin: The Story of the Badger State* (Madison: Wisconsin Trails, 1995), 133.

²⁰ Apps, 31.

theory rather than application and practical teaching that the students could use on their own farms. Initially, few farmers sent their sons to the school, because they wanted their sons to be working the land.

When the University of Wisconsin Experiment Station was established on the Madison campus in 1883, the University began to shift its emphasis to more practical aspects of agricultural science. In addition, research programs were initiated for the improvement of dairying, related farming and cheese making.²¹ In 1889, the Wisconsin State Legislature established the College of Agriculture. The program still was not exactly what smaller farmers or factory owners wanted, for it was a four-year program and was regarded by many as an unnecessary extravagance. In response, in the same year, the College initiated a short course created for cheese and butter manufacturers who simply wanted to refine their skills. This course was called the Dairy School and lasted 12 weeks. In this course, students, who usually were in their 30s, learned how to make cheese, grade cheese, test milk and separate cream, among other things.²² Thus the State provided an effective range of training opportunities to support the development of the industry.

As the industry became more significant and as public concern for the quality of foodstuffs grew, government regulations and quality controls became increasingly important features of the industry. Grading and establishment of industry standards certainly changed cheesemaking over time. In 1885, the Rennet test was invented and in 1889, the Wisconsin Dairy and Food Commission began its operations. The Commission helped set standards to ensure the quality and freshness of dairy products. In 1893, the cheesemakers of Wisconsin organized and created the Wisconsin Cheesemakers' Association. In 1916, a licensing system was established for cheese factories, and around 1922, the modern grading system of cheese was instituted.²³

With technology and training in place, the cheesemaking industry was poised for rapid growth, and grow it did in Fond du Lac County. Chester Hazen's path-breaking factory and other, less well-publicized enterprises, soon faced competition from newly opened firms. Many other individuals in the County found cheesemaking to be profitable. According to 1895 census data, Fond du Lac County had at least 65 functioning cheese factories. This figure should be regarded as a minimum rather than a precise count, for the data are based on self-reporting by the

²¹ Apps, 32.

²² Apps, 33.

²³ Apps, 165.

owners and operators of the cheese factories. It seems likely that more cheese factories were in existence at this time, with some operations remaining unreported.²⁴

Cheese factories were concentrated in some areas within Fond du Lac County. Fond du Lac and Marshfield Townships had the most cheese factories. Fond du Lac Township included the largest city in the county, and cheese factories were established near the city because it was easier to sell and transport the products. Marshfield, on the other hand, did not contain any large cities. Campbellsport, in Ashford Township, also had many cheese factories. The placement of cheese factories in this area likely was due to the greater proximity of Milwaukee and of railroad transportation, for many railroad lines ran from Fond du Lac to Milwaukee, making it easier to transport cheese in this part of the county. This could help explain the pattern of placement of cheese factories in the eastern part of Fond du Lac County. And of course to the east of Fond du Lac was Plymouth, the cheesemakers' "Mecca."

In 1909, cheesemakers in Fond du Lac County produced 6,501,411 pounds of cheese and the producers received \$927,581 for this cheese. That equaled 14 cents per pound of cheese, which was quite low considering the demand that existed for Wisconsin cheese. In 1909, 69 cheese factories were located in Fond du Lac County, an increase of four since 1895. At this time, 46.6 per cent of the nation's cheese was produced in Wisconsin, with 15 per cent of that amount produced in Fond du Lac County. In 1915, Fond du Lac County cheese production grew to 9,671,636 pounds of cheese, over 3 million more pounds than in 1909 (49% increase). It is clear that the volume of the product had expanded greatly in many enterprises, even if the number of factories had not increased. In 1915, producers in the County received \$1,391,259.49 for the cheese they had produced. The average price of 14 cents per pound of cheese was the same in 1915 as it had been in 1909. Between 1909 and 1915, 16 new cheese factories opened in Fond du Lac, suggesting that, for many of the local enterprises, the volume of production could not easily be increased, given existing conditions.²⁵

In 1917, Fond du Lac County cheese factories produced 12,390,097 pounds of cheese, almost a three million pound increase (28%) from the 1915 total. It is clear that the pace of growth in volume of production was accelerating, for it had taken from 1909 to 1915 to produce

²⁴ H. C. Adams, *List of Creameries and Cheese Factories in Wisconsin, 1896*, Dairy Commissioner's Records, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

²⁵ G. Weigle, Dairy Commissioner, "Butter factories and cheese factories: Wisconsin Dairy Statistics for 1915," 1916 compilation, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

a similar increase in production volume. Cheese production in 1917 was valued at \$2,824,373.03. The price per pound had also increased to 22 cents per pound in 1917, possibly due in part to wartime demands. During the period 1915-1917, eight new cheese factories were opened in the County.²⁶

In general during this period, the cheese industry in Fond du Lac County was growing dramatically, with existing producers joined by newer manufacturers. Most of the cheese factories that were in existence in 1895 were still producing in 1917.

By 1919, Fond du Lac County had 116 cheese factories. These cheese factories produced over 11.5 million pounds of cheese worth over \$3.4 million. The price per pound of cheese in 1919 was 29 cents. It is notable that while the value of Fond du Lac County's cheese continued to rise, there was a seven per cent decline in the total amount of cheese produced.

The majority of cheese factories in Fond du Lac County produced American cheese, while some produced brick cheese. At this time, Wisconsin was producing 63.1 per cent of the nation's cheese. Fond du Lac County, however, had begun to decline as a player in the overall industry in the state, producing only 2.5 per cent of the 1919 total Wisconsin production of cheese.²⁷

In 1921, cheese production increased throughout the State of Wisconsin, including Fond du Lac County. During this year, factories produced 12.4 million pounds of cheese, almost one million pounds more than had been manufactured in 1919 and roughly equivalent to the 1917 level of production. But the value of the cheese produced in 1921 was only \$2.3 million, half a million dollars less than a similar volume of production in 1917 and over one million dollars less than the smaller quantity manufactured in 1919. The price of cheese had fallen precipitately from 29 cents per pound to 18 cents per pound. On average, cheesemakers received four and a half cents less for their cheese in 1921 than they had in 1919.

While this loss was significant, signaling some of the woes that would beset American agriculture through the next two decades, the decline in revenue was partly offset because the price of corn also had fallen (the basis for estimating the feeding value of skim milk and whey). Thus the producers of feed also bore part of the market decline. The value of skim milk and

²⁶ G. Weigle, Dairy Commissioner, "Butter factories and cheese factories: Wisconsin Dairy Statistics for 1917," March 1918 compilation, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

²⁷ G. Weigle, Dairy Commissioner, "Butter factories and cheese factories: Wisconsin Dairy Statistics for 1919," April 1920 compilation, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

whey for 1921 was also about 60 per cent less than in 1919. These figures show a tremendous slump in prices for the goods and services produced by the farmer. Unsurprisingly, with this decline in prices, Fond du Lac County lost 19 cheese factories during the two-year period (116 in 1919, 97 in 1921).²⁸

In 1925, Fond du Lac County cheese factories still produced over 10 million pounds of American cheese and 300,000 pounds of brick cheese. This cheese was worth over 2.4 million dollars, three per cent of the 79 million dollars made by Wisconsin cheese manufacturers in that year.²⁹

Table I (Appendix) compares numbers of cheese factories in the townships within Fond du Lac County for the years 1895, 1917, 1919, and 1925. Ashford, Marshfield, Fond du Lac and Taycheedah townships consistently boasted the largest number of cheese factories. Some townships do not list any cheese factories because they either did not report the data or because the cheese factories within the townships were combined with other food processing and hence were not counted as cheese factories. From 1895 to 1919, the number of cheese factories continued on an upward trend. By 1919, the number of townships with cheese factories had also grown. This occurred because the cheese and dairy industry was booming, so people increasingly were likely to invest time and money into the making of cheese. By 1925, the trend changed as the dairy industry suffered from a depression, the result of overproduction of basic crops. Even though there were fewer factories, those factories remaining in operation were now producing more than enough cheese to make up for the small factories that no longer could operate profitably. Wisconsin cheese manufacturers continued to supply the nation's demand for cheese, but the industry had clearly shifted from its earlier pattern of sustained and rapid growth.

Table II (Appendix) depicts the amount of cheese produced in Fond du Lac County and in the whole of Wisconsin over a ten-year period. The dollar amounts represent the value of the cheese produced in the County and in the State of Wisconsin. The table shows an upward trend both in cheese production and in the value of that cheese. There was a decrease in the amount of cheese produced and its value in 1921, due to the onset of a depression in farming prices. By 1923 both the State and the County had recovered part of the losses from the postwar slump.

²⁸ J. Q. Emery, Dairy Commissioner, "Butter factories, cheese factories, condenseries and receiving stations: Wisconsin Dairy Statistics for 1921," May 1922 compilation, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

²⁹ J. Q. Emery, Dairy Commissioner, "Butter factories, cheese factories, condenseries and receiving stations: Wisconsin Dairy Statistics for 1925," July 1926 compilation, Microfilm, Steenbock Memorial Library, Madison.

Today, Wisconsin dairy farmers claim that there are over 400 varieties of cheese produced in Wisconsin. They further assert that Wisconsin cheese is richer in calcium than that produced in other states, due to choice of feed for the cows. Cheese has been and continues to be an important part of economic life in Fond du Lac County and Wisconsin. Wisconsin residents cheerfully accept the appellation of “cheeseheads” as they continue to ship their delicious products all over the world.

APPENDIX

Table I

<u>Township</u>	<u>1895</u>	<u>1917</u>	<u>1919</u>	<u>1925</u>
Ripon				
Metomen	1		2	2
Alto				
Rosendale	3	3	5	3
Springvale				
Waupun				
Eldorado	4	3	5	4
Lamartine			2	
Oakfield	2	4	3	4
Friendship			3	2
Fond du Lac	13	13	9	13
Byron			4	
Taycheedah	5	12	11	9
Empire				
Eden	9	10	11	3
Ashford	15	17	14	13
Calumet				
Marshfield	8	17	16	12
Osceola			1	
Forest				
Auburn		1	2	

Table II

<u>Year</u>	<u>Fond du Lac</u>	<u>Wisconsin</u>
1915	9,671,636 lbs. \$1,391,259.49	234,929,037 lbs. \$32,835,922.53
1917	12,390,097 lbs. \$2,824,373.03	277,267,444 lbs. \$63,470,882.69
1919	12,525,436 lbs. \$3,433,624.32	307,365,073 lbs. \$90,984,373.55
1921	12,445,078 lbs. \$2,276,932.72	298,732,969 lbs. \$53,007,048.06
1923	12,193,956 lbs. \$2,859,716.57	332,426,653 lbs. \$75,083,501.66
1925	11,227,187 lbs. \$2,467,548.75	362,677,940 lbs. \$79,595,515.23

The Sadoff Family of Fond du Lac

Dawn Iorio

On October 30, 1971, the stage in the gymnasium at St. Mary's Middle School was filled with three hundred prominent Fond du Lac citizens. The community of Fond du Lac had gathered to recognize the success of one of its members, Ben Sadoff. The *Fond du Lac Reporter* summed up the view of many:

Ben Sadoff's success story in the rough and tumble world of automobile parts and manufacturing . . . is how one man accumulated the savvy or know-how to turn red into black, to reorganize a failing venture into a productive one or to move a stumbling business and put it on its feet in a matter of months The story of Ben Sadoff and his family cannot be unrivaled [sic] in the history of Fond du Lac and seldom equaled in Wisconsin.¹

Despite what might be taken as dramatic hyperbole, this assertion is in fact an understatement, for the Sadoff family's experience in America over three generations represents a truly remarkable success story, one that was very important in the shaping of the city of Fond du Lac's growth and its character as a community in the twentieth century.

A common saying in Europe during the early 1900s was that "The streets in America are lined with gold." For many Jews who lived in Europe, the trip to America seemed worth taking both for what they might find and for what they left behind. Most Jews in Europe encountered bigotry and restrictive laws that deprived them of the opportunity to make a living and often threatened their lives. America, they hoped, might give them the chance to become wealthy beyond their wildest dreams. Among those who made the decision to leave their homes were Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff, Jewish immigrants from Odessa, Ukraine. The Sadoff family would indeed go from rags to riches, becoming prominent members in an American town, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.

Since the Sadoff family's arrival early in the twentieth century, its members have contributed a great deal to the Fond du Lac community. The Sadoff name in Fond du Lac has been associated with great business achievement, wealth, and humanitarian effort; Russia's loss became Fond du Lac's good fortune. In many ways the Sadoff family's history has mirrored Fond du Lac's growth. Within the city, they also were a major factor in the growth, flourishing, and eventual decline of the Jewish community.

¹ "Ben Sadoff's Story," *The Reporter*, October 27, 1971.

Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff with their Nine Children, 1948

Sons (left to right) Arthur, George, Ben, David

Daughters (left to right) Charna, Leone, Betty, Fannie, Rose

Several events contributed to the wave of Jewish immigration from Russia to the U.S. Jews in Russia faced much turmoil during the last century. In 1880, Central and Eastern Europe, which included the empires of Germany, Austria-Hungary and Russia, contained 80 per cent of the world's Jewish population, more than nine million people.² Their family roots in this area could be traced back hundreds of years. A century later, the Soviet Union's two million Jews, living mainly in territories that had formerly been part of the three defunct empires, represented only the third largest Jewish community in the world. Nearly one-half of the world's Jewish population of thirteen million lived in the Western Hemisphere. Today there are more than five million Jews in the United States. About 3.5 million live in Israel, and more than a million are citizens of France and Great Britain.

The waves of Jewish emigration from Eastern Europe began soon after 1881, when Tsar Alexander II was assassinated by a terrorist organization. Anti-Jewish riots followed the Tsar's assassination. Prior to this event, there had been small waves of Jewish emigration, but the murder of the Emperor triggered a dramatic increase. Over the next few years there continued to be an outward flow in response to the organized anti-Jewish riots, or "pogroms."

Such mass eruptions of violence against Russian Jews were often planned and directed by the government.³ Police allowed mobs to rape, torture, and burn Jewish residents. It was legal to rob the Jews of their possessions, or the law would turn a blind eye to such acts. The pogroms became an outlet for frustration of the Russian peasantry. Russian Jews became the scapegoat for this misery, producing mass violence that might otherwise have been directed at the government. Years later, Thelma Sadoff recalled her mother-in-law Rebecca Sadoff's, experience in the pogroms. When Russian soldiers searched for Jews, Rebecca and Abraham Sadoff hid with their children in the cellar. Because the couple had three young children, the Sadoffs covered the babies' mouths with their hands to muffle the children's cries.⁴

² Ronald Sanders, *Shores of Refuge, A Hundred Years of Jewish Emigration* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1988), 23.

³ Rabbi Benjamin Blech, *Jewish History and Culture* (New York: Alpha Books, 1999), 371.

⁴ Thelma Sadoff Interview, October 14, 2001.

Russian Jews were also restricted as to the region in which they could live. The Pale of Settlement was a network of provinces in the west and southwest of the Russian Empire where Jews were allowed to reside. It constituted a sort of giant ghetto in which Jews could live, travel, and do business. Roughly three million Jews were affected by this decision. The limitation imposed by the Pale would be in effect as late as 1910.

In addition to physical violence, Russian Jews suffered economic discrimination. Jews were not allowed to work in Russia's heavy industry. Most Jewish businesses consisted of small cottage-like workshops and modest factories. During this time, about a third of the Jews were employed in light industry, and more than ten per cent were laborers or peddlers. Many continued these professions when they moved to America.

This was the situation into which Abraham Sadoff was born on May 18, 1876, in Odessa.⁵ Today Odessa is the fifth largest city in the independent country of Ukraine and is its most important commercial city. It is the largest city on the Black Sea and a principal seaport. Abraham Sadoff was the son of Arthur and Leone Sadoff. In 1897, he married Rebecca Manis in Odessa. He was associated with manufacturing in Odessa, operating a small cabinet factory.⁶ Oppression of the Jews and lack of economic opportunity encouraged him to immigrate to the United States early in the twentieth century. Abraham Sadoff came directly to Fond du Lac, where his wife, Rebecca, and their children later joined him.

His reason for choosing Fond du Lac is unknown. He may have had friends or acquaintances in the area, for Fond du Lac had a small number of Jewish residents at the time. Perhaps he chose Fond du Lac as his place of residence because of the opportunities it provided him and its close proximity to a large city, Milwaukee.

Wisconsin had certainly long been a common destination for new Americans coming from Central and Eastern Europe. Historically, Milwaukee has been one of America's most popular cities for immigrants.⁷ There were waves of immigration in response to Milwaukee's growth as a commercial and industrial center. As was common in immigrant communities, neighborhoods were created along both ethnic and economic

⁵ "Pioneer Leader In Business Life of City is Dead," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 8, 1951.

⁶ "Sadoff, Jewish Leader, Dies," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 8, 1951.

⁷ William Cronon, *Wisconsin's Past and Present, A Historical Atlas* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1998), 24-25.

lines. The Russian Jews of Milwaukee lived along the Kinnickinnic River, near the Water Street neighborhood, in the middle of the “German core” neighborhood. To the northeast was the “Polish laborer” neighborhood. The Russian Jews came to Milwaukee as part of a third great wave of European newcomers. They had been preceded, before the American Civil War, by Irish and Germans. After the Civil War, in the 1880s, Poles came to the city, largely from German-controlled areas of Poland. The third wave of immigrants came to Milwaukee and eastern Wisconsin from southern and eastern Europe between 1890 and 1910. It was during this period that Abraham Sadoff came to the United States.⁸

Between 1840 and 1930, the Jewish population in the United States increased from fifty thousand to four and a half million. Like other new immigrants, Russian Jews had to learn the English language and adapt to American ways. There was much competition for jobs in a marketplace that was overflowing with cheap labor.⁹

Abraham Sadoff may have had family or friends from Odessa who lived in or near Milwaukee prior to his immigration. Typically, one individual or family from a community would move to the United States and establish a home. After they were residents for a time, perhaps months or even years, they would send for other relatives and friends. In this way it was common for extended families to resettle in America, member by member.

The Sadoffs also may have chosen Fond du Lac because of its role as a railroad center. At the time, Fond du Lac was an important division point on the Chicago Northwestern Railroad, with a booming local economy, and the city was more important to the economy of the State at that time than it is today. At the turn of the century, Fond du Lac was an important sawmilling and woodworking center, the eighth largest city in Wisconsin. Perhaps because of Abraham Sadoff’s background as a cabinetmaker, he found Fond du Lac and its wood products industries attractive as a residence.

In any event, it is clear that the family did have relations who lived in both Milwaukee and Sheboygan during the years following Abraham Sadoff’s arrival, although it is uncertain whether any of them came to Wisconsin earlier than he did.

⁸ Cronon, 24-25.

⁹ Blech, 221.

The exact date of Abraham Sadoff's arrival in Fond du Lac is also uncertain. Articles in the local newspaper report that he, his wife Rebecca, and four children arrived in 1903.¹⁰ According to the children's obituaries, however, all four were born in the Russian city of Odessa. Their birth dates ranged from 1898 to 1905. Charna was born on December 25, 1898. Ben, the first son, was born June 11, 1900. Fannie and Betty were born March 5, 1904 and January 1, 1905. The remaining five children, David, George, Arthur, Leone, and Rose, were all born in Fond du Lac. David was the first Sadoff child born in Fond du Lac, on December 25, 1909.¹¹

The 1907 edition of the *Fond du Lac City Directory* lists Abraham Sadoff as a resident. This is the earliest directory in which his name appears.¹² Publication of the directories occurred about a year after the data were collected, and this would place the Sadoffs in Fond du Lac by 1906. It is therefore likely that Abraham Sadoff arrived in Fond du Lac sometime during 1905 or 1906.

The family must have been rather poor when they arrived, for Abraham Sadoff was unable to take up his previous career as a cabinetmaker. In 1907, soon after Abraham Sadoff arrived in Fond du Lac, he began to conduct business as a "peddler." This was the humble beginning of the "A. Sadoff & Son" scrap metal business.¹³ By 1911, Abraham Sadoff had moved his family to a farmhouse located at 415 Cedar Street, while he continued to work as a peddler and junk collector.¹⁴ He was known as a friendly collector who roamed the streets of Fond du Lac with a horse and wagon in quest of junk. The Sadoff family's poverty was not abject, however, for during this time, the horse and wagon that were essential to his trade represented a substantial business investment.¹⁵

By 1916, the Fond du Lac City directory listed Abraham Sadoff as a dealer in rubber, metals, and rags. He was still operating out of his home on Cedar Street.¹⁶ The peddlers of this time typically drove their wagons and carts to rural areas. There they would barter with farmers for worn-out equipment and other items that had resale value,

¹⁰ "Sadoff, Jewish Leader, Dies," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* September 8, 1951.

¹¹ "David Sadoff," *The Reporter* March 5, 1976.

¹² *Fond du Lac City Directory 1907*, 256.

¹³ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1907*, 256.

¹⁴ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1911*, 264.

¹⁵ "An Honor Well Deserved," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, May 17, 1967.

¹⁶ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1916*, 59.

including rags and bones.¹⁷ Abraham Sadoff then sold the discarded items to mills, smelters, or foundries, where the scrap materials would be processed. Initially there was not a clear distinction between scrap collectors and processors.

Soon, other members of the Sadoff's extended family began to move to Fond du Lac, including Abraham Sadoff's brothers, Sam and Max. Sam moved to a residence on Military Road, where he was listed as a laborer.¹⁸ In 1915, Max came to Fond du Lac and was also employed as a laborer, according to the *Fond du Lac City Directory*.¹⁹ At this time, Sam moved to Cedar Street near Abraham Sadoff's home. Sam Sadoff did cabinetry work, which had been his profession in Russia.

Members of Rebecca Manis-Sadoff's family also moved to the area. By 1913, her brothers Harry, Sam, and Srool were living on Cedar Street.²⁰ Their professions were similar to that of Abraham Sadoff. Harry became a peddler, while Sam bought and sold junk out of his home. Srool was a cabinetmaker, working in the same home. Thus both Abraham Sadoff's and Rebecca Manis' extended family took up familiar professions, working as peddlers, laborers, or as cabinetmakers, as they had done in Odessa.

In 1917, Abraham's oldest son, Ben, joined the family business. Ben purchased a horse, harness, and wagon for \$10 to join his father's firm.²¹ The company was renamed "A. Sadoff & Son." At seventeen years of age, Ben left high school, without graduating, to join his father in the peddling trade. As a child, Ben had sold newspapers for a man who owned a local novelty store in order to help support the family.²² He showed great responsibility as the eldest son of nine children. While growing up, Ben purchased all of his own clothing in order to lessen the financial pressure on his parents. Ben was later quoted as saying, "We were poor, really poor" during the years before World War I.²³

Soon after Ben joined the family business, the barn behind the family home caught fire, and their wagons and other equipment were destroyed.²⁴ All of the neighbors

¹⁷ Fred Weller, *Achievements in Fond du Lac During the 1900's* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Action Printing, 1982), 86.

¹⁸ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1913*, 275.

¹⁹ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1916*, 59.

²⁰ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1913*, 112.

²¹ "Ben Sadoff," *The Reporter*, August 12, 1990.

²² "An Honor Well Deserved," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, May 12, 1967.

²³ "Ben Sadoff's Story," *The Reporter*, October 27, 1971.

²⁴ "An Honor Well Deserved," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, May 12, 1967.

tried to keep the fire from spreading. Evidently, the Sadoffs soon recovered from this setback, for in 1919 Ben had enough capital to acquire the Sweet Wagon Works Company located on West Arndt Street, near the west branch of the Fond du Lac River.

Sometime between 1916 and 1921, Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff moved their family from 415 Cedar to 127 North Main Street, a property that stills exists today.²⁵ The family was still in the junk business. More of the children began to work for Abraham and Ben Sadoff. Abraham's daughter Fannie became a bookkeeper for the company. His son-in-law, Julius Smith, who was married to daughter Charna, was a clerk for A. Sadoff & Son. During this time, the family opened a warehouse on West Cotton Street that was used to store all of the scrap metal and junk.

Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff left the scrap metal business in the early 1920s. They opened a furniture store at their North Main Street home. The two lived upstairs with their children, while the store operated downstairs. Abraham and Rebecca were said to be "good and conscientious citizens."²⁶ In 1923, Ben Sadoff had acquired the entire company of A. Sadoff & Son from his father. He renamed the company Ben Sadoff Iron & Metal, keeping the Cotton Street location. Ben Sadoff was beginning to build his business empire in Fond du Lac.

In addition to his expanding role in business, Ben Sadoff began his own family. On June 24, 1923, Ben Sadoff married Dina Cohen of Fond du Lac.²⁷ Dina was the daughter of Meyer and Sophia Hodus Cohen, who had emigrated from Minsk, Russia (now Belarus). The couple married at Kehiloth Jacob Synagogue. Ben and his new bride took a honeymoon for the duration of the next month, another sign of increasing prosperity of the family. Their new home was at 150 West Second Street. The year 1925 saw the beginning of a third generation of Sadoffs living in Fond du Lac. On March 25, Dina Sadoff gave birth to the couple's only child, Howard. The Sadoffs planned great things for this child, whom they expected would inherit the family's growing business concerns.

By the late 1920s, Ben was seeking other business ventures, and the growing automobile industry was an obvious choice. He opened a "super service" filling station,

²⁵ Fond du Lac City Directory 1921, 439.

²⁶ "An Honor Well Deserved," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, May 12, 1967.

²⁷ "Three Hundred Guests Attend Big Reception," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, June 25, 1923.

located on the corner of North Main and Cotton Streets. Ben's younger brother, George, managed the station.

By 1930, Ben Sadoff Iron & Metal expanded and moved to 235 West Arndt Street. This had been the location of the Sweet Wagon Works Company. Ben Sadoff served as the President of the company. Many members of the Sadoff family were active in the business, keeping it a family operation. Ben Sadoff appointed his brother-in-law, David Nemschoff, Vice President. Nemschoff was married to Ben's older sister, Fannie. Betty Sadoff was the firm's secretary.

In August 1931, Ben Sadoff expanded his business empire by purchasing Wells Manufacturing Company from a creditor. Prior to his purchase, the company had only seven employees and was bankrupt.²⁸ The company manufactured a limited number of electrical coils and radios for automobiles.²⁹ After purchasing the company, Ben served on the Board of Directors and as President. He enjoyed the challenge of rebuilding and expanding the company, as he had done with Ben Sadoff Iron & Metal. The expansion of Wells Manufacturing began almost immediately.

Ben Sadoff bought American Motor Products, then located in New York City, in May 1938, and he moved its operations to Fond du Lac, where that business became part of the Wells Manufacturing Company expansion project. By acquiring other part manufacturers, Ben Sadoff planned to develop the company into a well-rounded automobile parts manufacturing business, one that could offer customers a broader range of products.

As part of the acquisition of American Motors Products, Ben Sadoff relocated several of its employees to Fond du Lac. Thelma Cravet, from Brooklyn, New York, began working in the Fond du Lac office of Wells in May 1938. Ben's younger brother, Arthur, who also worked for the company, began to court Thelma. The two were married on September 18, 1938. Ben Sadoff then made twenty-five-year-old Arthur a partner in the family businesses.³⁰

Abraham Sadoff developed another business in Fond du Lac that was quite different from his previous interests. Badger Liquor Company opened on December 8,

²⁸ "Ben Sadoff's Story," *The Reporter*, October 27, 1971.

²⁹ "Wells Manufacturing Corporation," *The Reporter*, December 6, 1999.

³⁰ Thelma Sadoff Interview, October 14, 2001.

1933.³¹ The company was founded only three days after Prohibition ended. The Badger Liquor store, which served as a wholesale liquor firm, was located near the Sadoff Main Street home. Abraham's son, David, and his son-in-law, Irving Fishelson, who was married to Leone, operated the company. Some newspaper reports concerning the year Badger Liquor was founded are inaccurate. According to both Abraham's and David Sadoff's obituaries, Badger Liquor Company was founded in December 1933.³² Irving Fishelson's obituary listed the same date. But articles from the *Fond du Lac Reporter* give the wholesaler's founding date as 1935, the same date listed in Arthur Sadoff's obituary.³³ The *Fond du Lac City Directory* listed Badger Liquor Company in its 1934 edition, so this indicates that the firm was in business in 1933.³⁴ By 1935 the company had been operating for at least one year. Perhaps this discrepancy was due to the fact that the wholesaler opened its doors only three days after Prohibition officially ended. Could a wholesaler have legally obtained an entire inventory of alcohol so quickly?

One member of the Sadoff family provided a somewhat puzzling account of Badger Liquor's origins. Arthur Sadoff commented in 1992, "He [Abraham Sadoff] started working in a liquor store, delivering alcohol to bars from the trunk of his car. Prohibition was over and distilleries were looking for distributors. The opportunity was there and my father took it."³⁵ But by 1934, Abraham Sadoff was already an established businessman in the city. Why would he have been working in a liquor store, as Arthur stated? While there is no police record suggesting that Abraham Sadoff participated in any illegal acts during Prohibition, many Fond du Lac people still believe that the Sadoffs were selling illegal alcohol during Prohibition. There was support in many communities for turning a blind eye to such violations, which was why the social experiment failed.

During World War II, Ben and Arthur Sadoff adapted both Sadoff Iron & Metal and Wells Manufacturing to serve the war effort. Wells employed 375 people during the World War. They manufactured the Norden bombsight, which was used to improve the accuracy of bombs delivered from airplanes and was one of the most closely guarded

³¹ "Irving Fishelson," *The Reporter*, September 18, 1970.

³² "David Sadoff," *The Reporter*, March 5, 1976.

³³ "Arthur Sadoff," *The Reporter*, February 2, 1999.

³⁴ *Fond du Lac City Directory 1934*, 300.

³⁵ "Badger Liquor Company, Inc.," *The Reporter*, (Monthly Column) August 1992.

secrets of the war.³⁶ Sadoff Iron & Metal was presented with a banner from the War Production Board for its production of scrap iron. Arthur Sadoff, who was in his late twenties at the time of the war, had wanted to enlist in the Armed Services. According to his wife, Thelma, he was told by officials to stay in Fond du Lac and work at the family businesses, a not uncommon decision regarding people who worked in critical war industries.

The Sadoff family experienced a major change in the 1950s. Abraham Sadoff, the family patriarch, died on September 8, 1951. He was seventy-five years old. He had served the community as a prominent Jewish leader, businessman, and industrialist for thirty years. As a retired man, Abraham Sadoff earned statewide recognition for his accomplishments. Ben Sadoff inherited his father's role as the leader of the family.

In the late 1950s and early 1960s the Sadoff family saw growth and change. Howard Sadoff became the President of Wells Manufacturing in 1956. He succeeded his father, Ben, who became Chairmen of the Board. Arthur Sadoff remained a co-owner. There were clear plans for Howard to assume the leadership role in the family's industries. Unfortunately, tragedy struck.

In 1961 Howard and Arthur Sadoff were golfing at South Hills Country Club, when Howard complained of feeling ill. Arthur took Howard to Howard's Lakewood beach home, where Howard's wife, Isabel, called an ambulance.³⁷ He had suffered a heart attack and died at his home the same day, May 5, 1961. He was thirty-six years old. Howard and his wife had two young daughters. Because Howard was the only child of Ben Sadoff, he had been slated to take over the family empire when his father retired.

Ben Sadoff, left without his son as a prospective successor to run Sadoff Iron & Metal and Wells Manufacturing, soon began to divest himself of his business enterprises. In December 1963, he sold Wells Manufacturing. Only in his sixties, the aging Ben Sadoff had clearly been affected by the death of his son. Wells Manufacturing was purchased by the Dyson-Kissner Corporation of New York. This privately held investment firm controlled a line of manufacturing companies. In 1963 Dyson-Kissner had an

³⁶ "Local Industry played a Key Role," *The Reporter*, June 6, 1985; "Wells Manufacturing Corporation," *The Reporter*, December 6, 1999.

³⁷ Thelma Sadoff Interview, October 14, 2001.

estimated \$200 million in assets.³⁸ The sale of Wells Manufacturing Company started the decline of the Sadoff family role in the field of local industry.

Rebecca Sadoff died in 1963. She had been ill for several months. At the time of her death, she lived with her daughter, Rose Ruttenberg, in Fond du Lac. This death spelled the end of the generation of the Sadoff family that had originally made the decision to come to Fond du Lac.

The family's scrap metal business began to change, too. In July 1965, Sadoff Iron & Metal announced plans to merge with two Oshkosh companies, Block Iron & Supply and Sommerfeld Welders' Supply. The three companies would be known as Sadoff & Block Industries, and resulted in an expansion of all three facilities. At that time, Sadoff Iron & Metal was one of the largest processors of scrap in the Midwest and had been in business for almost sixty years. The merger became effective on July 29, 1965.³⁹ After the sale, Ben Sadoff retired, and for the first time in almost sixty years, he was not active in local industry.

The Sadoff family was not exclusively involved in business, for they contributed greatly to the Fond du Lac Jewish community by organizing both the local temple and by developing a Jewish section at Rienzi Cemetery. There had been Jewish residents in Fond du Lac since the latter part of the nineteenth century, but a formal place of worship for local Jews was not established until 1914. Abraham Sadoff was a key figure in organizing the "Religious Society of Kehiloth Jacob," founded October 1, 1914.⁴⁰ Jewish religious services took place in a rented hall above the current Model Laundry, at the corner of Forest Avenue and Macy Street. In 1922, a permanent place of worship was purchased on the corner of Ruggles Street and Military Road. The building, a one-story frame house of two rooms, was named the Kehiloth Jacob Synagogue. Abraham Sadoff played a major role in organizing the Kehiloth Jacob Temple and in establishing a congregation burial ground in Rienzi Cemetery. In 1959, ground was broken at 149 East Division Street for Temple Beth Israel.⁴¹ The new temple had been Abraham Sadoff's dream. According to Thelma Sadoff, his family built the temple in his honor.

³⁸ "Wells Has New Warehouse In Atlanta," *The Reporter*, September 1, 1966.

³⁹ "Sadoff Iron Metal Firm Merger Plans Announced," *The Reporter*, July 29, 1965.

⁴⁰ Weller, 198-199.

⁴¹ Weller, 198-199.

In 1967, Ben Sadoff was honored as a civic leader by the Jewish National Fund of Wisconsin. Ben had also done work on behalf of the State of Israel, and he was honored with a plaque commemorating his donation of 2,500 trees for the John F. Kennedy Memorial and Peace Forest in Israel. The peace forest, located high in the Judean hills outside Jerusalem, was dedicated in 1966. It was established by the Jewish National Fund with money collected by American Jewry and by non-Jews who contributed in memory of President Kennedy. The forest of six million trees was planted in memory of the Jews murdered during the Holocaust.⁴²

Ben Sadoff was also recognized for his accomplishments in the automotive industry. In 1969, although he was retired at the time, American Automotive Accessories Manufacturers of America honored him at an automotive show in Chicago. Sadoff, the former owner and President of Wells Manufacturing, a nationally-known auto parts producer, was respected in the business for his development of mass merchandising in the automotive parts industry.

As a retirement project, Ben Sadoff purchased U. S. Dimension Products in March 1970. It was one of the country's largest producers of coin banks and promotional supplies. In terms of its products, this enterprise was different from the other businesses that Ben had owned. He was Chairman of the Board, and Arthur Sadoff served as President. The company was located in Menomonee Falls, Wisconsin. Because of the brothers' ages and the company's location, at some distance from Fond du Lac, they did not own the business long. They found commuting to be more arduous than they had expected.⁴³

Transition in the family continued. Dina Sadoff, Ben's wife, died in 1970. That September, Irving Fishelson, Leone Sadoff's husband, passed away, too. Irving Fishelson had co-founded Badger Liquor Company. At the time of his death, his son, Bob, was Vice President in charge of operations. Bob Fishelson had begun working for the company in 1957. Arthur Sadoff, who had served as officer and co-owner of both Sadoff Iron & Metal and Wells Manufacturing, took over Badger Liquor. Arthur's son,

⁴² "Wisconsin Jewish Fund Honors Local Civic Leader," *The Reporter*, October 19, 1967.

⁴³ Thelma Sadoff Interview, October 8, 2001.

Ron, born in 1941, joined the company at the same time. The remaining Sadoff firm in Fond du Lac, Badger Liquor, moved to Morris Street, where it is still located, in 1971.

Ben Sadoff was an important philanthropist in Fond du Lac, both for the Jewish community and for the city as a whole. He was also a major benefactor to Marian College, a Catholic institute of higher education, organized by the Congregation of St. Agnes. The present Marian campus opened in September 1966. At that time, the campus consisted of two academic buildings, a classroom building and a science center.

Ben Sadoff had a long and friendly relationship with Marian College and especially with its President, Sister Sheila Burns, despite the fact that he was Jewish and the college (and Sister Sheila) were Roman Catholic. He served on the College's Board of Trustees for three years. Both Ben and Arthur Sadoff served as chairman of the College horse show. The shows were held at the county fairgrounds and proved to be a major fundraiser for the school.

In May 1967, Ben Sadoff was once again recognized for his outstanding achievements, as Marian College bestowed on him an Honorary Doctor of Laws degree. The college believed that he was deserving of the honor because of his distinguished community service and his contributions to educational and civic welfare in Fond du Lac.⁴⁴ Sadoff, a long time civic leader, philanthropist, and industrialist, received this acknowledgement of his many contributions, accomplishments of a man who had left high school at age seventeen and had never completed a formal education.

In 1975, the Marian College Board of Directors recommended naming the school's science building for Ben Sadoff. At its May 14 meeting, a motion was passed that the Marian College Science Hall be named Lazynski and Sadoff Hall. Walter Lazynski, another major benefactor of the college, declined the offer. In a vote by the Board on May 21, 1975, by a seven to three margin, it was decided to name the science classroom building "Ben Sadoff Science Center."⁴⁵ At that time, it was estimated that Sadoff had raised over \$500,000 for Marian College.

Civic recognition followed. To honor the dynamic citizen, October 30, 1971 was proclaimed by the City Council as "Ben Sadoff Day" in Fond du Lac. Ben Sadoff was

⁴⁴ "71 Will Receive Marian College Degree," *The Commonwealth Reporter*, May 11, 1967.

⁴⁵ Marian College Board of Directors Meeting Minutes (Cardinal Meyer Library: Marian College Archives), May 21, 1975.

Ben Sadoff at Marian College Horse Show, ca. 1964

honored for his community service involvement, including his work to establish the Blandine House. In the late 1960s, the County of Fond du Lac leaders had identified a need for a halfway house for recovering alcoholics. The Fond du Lac County budget lacked funds for such a project. Ben Sadoff set a goal to raise the money for the halfway house, identified a location for the house, and sparked the fund drive to make the Blandine House a reality.⁴⁶

To honor Ben Sadoff on his day, a reception was held in the gymnasium at St. Mary's Middle School on Merrill Avenue. A dinner was served, along with a ceremony reflecting on the many accomplishments of his life. Tickets to the event sold out fast. Ben spoke at the end of the reception, saying he wanted to continue to serve the people of Fond du Lac. Following the reception, a private party was held at the South Hills Country Club. Ben Sadoff's nephews, Bob Fishelson and Ron and Gary Sadoff, hosted this event.

In 1981 Marian College built a gymnasium. It cost \$800,000 and opened in October 1981. Ben Sadoff had donated \$135,000 to the school for the building, and he requested that the gym be named for his son, Howard. The Board agreed to the request because of a number of factors. Ben had served on the Board of Directors and had given substantial amounts of money to the College in the past. The Sadoff family's efforts during the horse shows had also generated a considerable amount of money for the College each year.⁴⁷ The Howard Sadoff Memorial Gymnasium was dedicated on January 21, 1982. A dinner and a reception were held at the College honoring both Ben and his deceased son Howard. Ben Sadoff's contributions to the school during the previous eighteen years were acknowledged, and Ben's love for his son was cited as a reflection of values that Marian College wanted to pass on to its students.

Ben Sadoff died August 12, 1990, at his sister's home in Lakewood Beach. He maintained residences in Fond du Lac and in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida. But by that time, many of the Sadoffs no longer lived in Fond du Lac, and the family's influence on the

⁴⁶ "Fond du Lac Pauses to Honor Dynamic Citizen Ben Sadoff," *The Reporter*, October 29, 1971.

⁴⁷ Marian College Board of Directors Meeting Minutes (Cardinal Meyer Library: Marian College Archives), September 16, 1981.

city had begun to wane. Howard Sadoff's children, Debra and Julie Sadoff, lived in Chicago.

Arthur and Thelma Sadoff celebrated sixty years of marriage in 1998. Arthur passed away on February 1, 1999. Members of Arthur's family were the only Sadoffs who did not move away from Fond du Lac. Today, they operate the liquor business that their grandfather, Abraham Sadoff, began.

Over the last twenty years the Jewish population of Fond du Lac has suffered a notable decline. At the time of the completion of the new temple, in 1959, there were nearly sixty Jewish families in the city. Because Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff had nine children, their family constituted much of the Jewish community. But the Sadoff grandchildren left for college, and most did not return. Often they married non-residents and moved away.

Indicative of the decline of the Jewish community is the closure of their place of worship. According to Thelma Sadoff, part of the reason for the decline in the number of Jewish families practicing in Fond du Lac has been controversy between members of the congregation and the current Rabbi, who is an Orthodox Jew. Orthodox Jews claim a total commitment to written and oral religious law, rejecting accommodation to new ideas and changes in life; they seek to maintain traditional Jewry. According to Mrs. Sadoff, most Jewish families in Fond du Lac follow the Conservative tradition, which is more flexible than the Orthodox. Conservative Judaism seeks a middle ground; Jewish law is maintained, but Conservative Jews accept the need for growth, change, and accommodation to the modern world. This difference over religious tradition and practice caused clashes between the Rabbi and some temple members and led many people to stop attending the Fond du Lac Temple.

In any event, Temple Beth Israel in Fond du Lac is no longer open on a regular basis. If Jewish families require services performed, they are allowed to open the building, but it is the family's responsibility to hire a rabbi and clean the building. It costs about \$600 to conduct a service. Because of the small number of Jewish residents and the cost of opening the building, no functions take place on a regular basis. At one time Arthur Sadoff and his sons paid for most of the building's upkeep. As it is no longer

cost-efficient to use Temple Beth Israel, most of the Jews in Fond du Lac attend holiday services in Oshkosh.

The businesses that Abraham Sadoff and his children built are flourishing today. Sadoff & Rudoy Industries still carries the family's name, even though the company was sold in 1965. There are no Sadoffs now affiliated with the firm. The company serves a family of worldwide businesses in the area of manufacturing, commercial, and melt industries. Sadoff & Rudoy provide scrap metal recycling services to industries. The company has three divisions and nine locations; there are over 300 employees. All of this began in 1906 with Abraham Sadoff and his wagon.

Badger Liquor is now the largest liquor distributor in Wisconsin. The 100,000 square-foot warehouse is located at 850 Morris Street. It is still a family operation. Abraham Sadoff's grandchildren run the business. Ron Sadoff is the President and his brother, Gary, is Vice President. Bob Fishelson is also active in the operations of Badger Liquor. Additional facilities have opened in Green Bay and Milwaukee in recent years, but the company's center of operations remains in Fond du Lac.⁴⁸

Wells Manufacturing, the company that Ben Sadoff transformed in the 1930s, also operates today. The business opened a warehouse in Iowa in 1986 and built a plant in Mexico three years later. Wells Manufacturing is a business giant that operates quietly from its headquarters in Fond du Lac.

When Abraham and Rebecca Sadoff came to America from Russia in 1906, they were in search of a better life. America, they hoped, would allow them to prosper economically. Most immigrants had high expectations upon their arrival in the United States, but the success that Abraham Sadoff and his family enjoyed scarcely could have been imagined upon his arrival. The businesses his family formed still affect the Fond du Lac community today, almost one hundred years later, and the Sadoffs have left an indelible mark on the community's development.

⁴⁸ "Badger Liquor is Biggest Distributor in the State," *The Reporter*, February 14, 2000.

KFIZ: Fond du Lac County's Original AM Radio Station

Anne Kelly

In 1922, Fond du Lac businessman Oscar Huelsman was seeking new ways to advertise the radios that he sold as an adjunct to his Fond du Lac automobile showroom and repair business. After some reflection, he decided to start a radio station. According to the local newspaper, “it wasn’t much of a station, crammed into a tiny ‘studio’ on the third floor of the Haber Printing Company building, next to Huelsman’s auto showroom and garage. But Huelsman and his business associate Lawrence Bush, and a mechanical expert Edward ‘Cap’ Conley were eager to set up a broadcasting outlet.”¹ This experiment grew into radio station KFIZ. The enthusiasm for the new medium, radio, could be seen not only in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin, but also across the nation as the new technology was tested and improved almost daily.

Radio technology was still a relatively recent development. In December 1901, Italian scientist Guglielmo Marconi perfected a radio system that transmitted Morse code over long distances. The implications of this transmission are still felt today. From its beginnings as a means of quick communication to its evolution as a commercial source of entertainment and information, radio was one of the most important communication advances of the twentieth century. The sociological impact of commercial radio on American society in the 1920s and 1930s was tremendous. Radio brought into millions of homes entertainment, news, and a new way to involve Americans in the developing mass culture of the modernizing country. Radio became the voice—a common thread—that tied Americans together through the difficult years of the Depression and World War II. It was the predecessor to television and remains a viable link to information and entertainment in today’s fast-paced world. While the telegraph was the first electronic link to unite the country, radio became the mass-audience electronic link that brought Americans together.

Radio stations that have come into existence over the years have had various operational philosophies. Some have been anchor stations for the networks; others concentrated on news or sports; still others focused on entertainment. “Local” radio

¹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

exists primarily for the purpose of keeping a community informed about matters that interest its residents. Some stations discard this “local” flavor in favor of formats such as all-net-work programming that require fewer personnel and generate more revenue. Over the three-quarters of a century that it has operated, Fond du Lac’s original AM station, KFIZ, has focused on local programming, and the station has survived and flourished through the perception that local programming, balanced with a mix of network offerings, is a formula for success and longevity.

The history of KFIZ shows a rich and reflective view of how American radio has developed and the nature of its influence on Fond du Lac and, in a broader sense, on the United States. KFIZ programming and personalities over the years illustrate the importance of radio in the community. KFIZ radio brought to Fond du Lac in the 1920s and 1930s a new form of communication and entertainment that linked the community to the wider world. As radios became common household appliances, KFIZ had a role in creating an identity for the Fond du Lac community in a way similar to that which radio stations collectively played in shaping an American identity.

At its inception, KFIZ’s owners held the philosophy that it was a community radio station. From its earliest days to the end of the twentieth century, the idea of local programming and service to the Fond du Lac community, provided through up-to-date news and weather, comprehensive Fond du Lac area sports coverage and original programming, was the cornerstone philosophy of station operation. Owners and station managers over the years took the approach of serving the community by focusing on this type of programming. While other stations in the area adopted different formats (e.g., all-music, all-religious or all-network programming), or changed from one format to another, KFIZ continued to entertain, inform and serve Fond du Lac County and the surrounding areas as the County’s only radio station that maintained its blended format of news, sports, information and entertainment over time. This philosophy remained the focus of operations and programming as the station neared the end of a century of operation.

With the rapid improvement in radio technology made at the beginning of the twentieth century, the door opened for radio to become a defining force for communication in America and the world. The relaxation of military restrictions on radio after World War I permitted many experimental radio stations to appear. Most were run with

homemade apparatus and operated by amateurs. The initial range of such broadcasts was only a few miles, and most broadcasters were experimenters who pursued radio as a hobby. Imaginative individuals such as David Sarnoff, later of the Radio Corporation of America (RCA) and the National Broadcasting Company (NBC), were already envisioning the possibilities of the new medium. In 1916, Sarnoff was the first to foresee the possibility of a radio receiver in every home.

The growth of commercial radio was rapid from the 1920s. Beginning with an interest in radio clubs in the early 1920s, soon a demand arose to hear music on the air, and this led to interest in receivers that anyone could use. Radio's role in society expanded explosively. The increase in numbers of listeners justified establishment of stations for the purposes of entertainment and broadcast information such as news, weather and sports.

November 2, 1920 saw the first commercial radio station, KDKA in Pittsburgh, broadcast the returns of the Harding-Cox presidential election. The success of this broadcast and of KDKA musical programs inspired others to form similar stations. By the end of 1921, there were eight commercial radio stations operating in the United States. The question of funding these emerging stations might be addressed by two different approaches. The first relied on the profit from the manufacture, sale, and licensure of radio receiving equipment, a method employed in Britain. The second required paying advertisers generating interest for a product or business through commercial messages. These advertising dollars eventually became the main support for broadcasting in the United States. A third approach, public subscriptions, while widely used in parts of Europe, never became popular in the United States other than for "public radio."

The year 1922 saw another innovation of great importance for radio broadcasting. Long-distance telephone lines connected a radio station in New York with another in Chicago in order to broadcast a football game, thus launching the first network radio broadcast. In 1926, the National Broadcasting Company, through its purchase of a New York radio station, established the first permanent network of radio stations to distribute daily programming.

Responding to the rapid growth of radio broadcasting in the 1920s, Congress passed the Radio Act of 1927. This legislation created the Federal Communications Commission. The FCC's primary role was to assign wavelengths to broadcasters.

By the mid 1920s, radio as a broadcast medium was off and running. *The National Almanac and Year-Book* for 1925 reported "The industry rose to a new height and it is estimated that sales for the entire year were in excess of \$6 million, thus marking an increase in five years from \$1 million."² The *Almanac* also made note of the broadcast transmission of Calvin Coolidge's inauguration ceremonies on March 4, 1925. It stated that nearly

twenty stations, all linked by long distance telephone wires, provided for the first time that so great an audience [could hear] the President of the United States take an oath of office. Letters of nearly 8,000 listeners to station WMAQ in Chicago were compiled in a scrapbook together with letters from other listeners in other states, and the volume was presented to President Coolidge.

This is just one example of the impact, both financial and social, that radio was beginning to make in just the first few years of its existence. The impact and contributions of commercial radio were just beginning.

As radio rapidly grew and changed on the national level, in Wisconsin its history was one of growth and change that closely reflected national trends. The history of radio in Wisconsin began in Madison at the University of Wisconsin. In 1917, the experimental station 9XM had "started sending daily weather bulletins supplied by the Weather Bureau by Morse code, and several hundred listeners in farm areas around Madison seemed to value the service."³

In 1919, when the government lifted restrictions on amateur radio operators following the end of World War I, 9XM resumed the daily weather bulletins. Professor Earle M. Terry, however, was anxious to shift to voice broadcasting, a project he had worked on during the war. "With vacuum tubes made in the university laboratory—none were on the market yet—he began voice tests in 1919 and continued throughout 1920."⁴ By the end of 1920, listeners heard 9XM test broadcasts as far away as Texas. By

² *National Almanac and Yearbook*, 1925, 656.

³ Erik Barnouw, *The History of Broadcasting in the United States: v. I: A Tower in Babel to 1933*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1966), 61.

⁴ Barnouw, 61.

January 3, 1921, voice weather forecasts were given daily, although they were still supplemented by Morse code bulletins. In January 1922, 9XM applied for call letters and a license and formally became WHA. This move was in line with the seventy-four other colleges and universities who in that year established broadcast stations.⁵ WHA is still in operation as the university radio station at the University of Wisconsin in Madison, and it is the oldest radio station in the state, according to the Commerce Department's Callsign and Station Owner Card Files.⁶

Several printed sources claim that WHAD, formerly broadcasting out of Marquette University in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, is the oldest station in the State. An article by Stan Gores about KFIZ that appeared in the *Commonwealth Reporter* stated, "station WHAD is believed to have been the 'first' in Wisconsin." As it is no longer in business, this leaves KFIZ with the designation as "one of the oldest stations in the Midwest."⁷ The content of this article was repeated by local historian Fred Weller in his 1982 book, *Achievements in Fond du Lac during the 1900's*. It is clear that WHA is the oldest station, but which is the oldest commercial station? WHA has always been a noncommercial station. WHAD received its commercial license in 1933, moving from an educational station to a commercial station.⁸ However, WHAD AM no longer exists. The station's call letters were re-licensed to the State of Wisconsin Educational Communications Board in February 28, 1947, as WHAD-FM. WHAD now operates in Delafield as an FM public radio station.⁹

According to government records, KFIZ was licensed as a "limited commercial" radio station in 1923.¹⁰ That predates WHAD's licensure, which incorrectly has been called the "first" station in Wisconsin. WHA of Madison, licensed in January of 1922, and broadcasting since 1917, is the oldest noncommercial radio station. A list compiled using the Commerce Department's Callsign and Station Owner Card Files shows that, among the one hundred oldest broadcasting stations in the United States, WHA is listed tenth and WISN in Milwaukee is listed 100th. WISN's date of licensure was July 22,

⁵ Barnouw, 82, 97.

⁶ United States Department of Commerce, Callsign and Station Owner Card Files.

⁷ *The Daily Commonwealth*, March 24, 1967.

⁸ Barnouw, 272n.

⁹ Federal Communications Commission, January 29, 2001.

¹⁰ State Historical Society of Wisconsin, License for Land Radio Station.

1922. This commercial station still exists today, and records from the Federal Communications Commission indicate there has been no change in its call letters. Therefore, when KFIZ received its license just over a year later, it became what is surely one of the oldest commercial stations in continuous existence in Wisconsin.

The history of radio in Fond du Lac began with the formation of radio clubs. These were groups of enthusiasts who owned receivers, but they did not have the capability to broadcast. Club members came together, talked about what they had heard, and shared information on what was on the “waves.” The Fondy Radio Club advertised its meetings in the *Daily Commonwealth*. An article dated January 6, 1923, urged people “to attend and get behind the movement to make the ‘Fondy’ club one of the best in the state.”¹¹ Bernard Weideman, an ardent supporter of the club, was quoted as saying, “If the fans of the city would only show as much interest in the club as they did in listening in with their sets, every fan in Fond du Lac would be a member.” This club was the first sign of support for and excitement about the new medium of communication.

As amateur radio enthusiasts continued to pursue their hobby, they created a market for electronic receiving equipment. In April 1923, T. W. Meiklejohn Company was assigned the distributorship for Mu-Rad receiving sets in Wisconsin and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. These radio receivers were hailed as the newest technology, “requiring no outside aerial or inside wiring or ground connections of any kind.”¹²

Two factors convinced the Meiklejohn Company to take on the new product. The first was the great interest farmers had in having a radio set in their homes. Here was a constant source of information of all kinds. Not only did radio provide reports on market conditions and weather, but, for those isolated on a farm, the radio receiver produced musical entertainment, educational programs, and brought the world into their homes, absolutely free. The country quickly embraced this new medium, and the great enthusiasm was reflected in the number of sets sold. The *Daily Commonwealth* reported “Figures just published show that 1,800,000 receiving sets are in use today whereas a year ago, there were only a few thousand.”¹³ The second factor that helped radio receiving sets become a hot business item locally was Wisconsin’s location. Surrounded by

¹¹ *The Daily Commonwealth*, January 6, 1923.

¹² *The Daily Commonwealth*, April 3, 1923.

¹³ *The Daily Commonwealth*, April 3, 1923.

powerful sending stations in every direction, Wisconsin residents could receive afternoon and evening programs daily. Minneapolis had three stations that broadcast programs; Davenport, Iowa had another, while Chicago boasted a half-dozen. Programming could be received clearly from stations as far away as St. Louis and Kansas City. The interest in radio shown by radio clubs that were trying to organize enthusiasts, plus the formation of a local company dedicated to selling receivers, suggested that Fond du Lac was ripe for its own sending station.

Local businessman Oscar A. Huelsman, looking for a unique way to stir up business for his Dodge automobile dealership, was the entrepreneur who made the decision to go into broadcasting in Fond du Lac. Huelsman's initial effort was an experimental radio station, set up with homemade equipment in cramped quarters on the third floor of the Haber Printing Company building. Haber Printing was located at 18 Forest Avenue, adjacent to the Huelsman Auto Showroom and Garage at 22 Forest Avenue in Fond du Lac.¹⁴

According to the original "License for Land Radio Station" by the Department of Commerce, Bureau of Navigation, Radio Service, KFIZ was officially licensed on July 12, 1923 with a Class A Limited Commercial license. The initial license for KFIZ from the Department of Commerce classified the station as a "limited commercial" station. In the United States, beginning in 1912, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Navigation regulated radio. One of the first steps taken by the Bureau was to divide land stations into eight classes, one of which was "Limited Commercial." Another category was "Experimental." When a license was issued, the classification was established. "The Limited Commercial classification was a catch-all group for stations that were set up for some commercial purpose, but were 'limited' in the sense that they did not handle public messages."¹⁵ Therefore, it appears that KFIZ was already considered a commercial radio station.

Assigned the call letters KFIZ, the station's owners, *The Daily Commonwealth* and Oscar Huelsman, were granted a three-month license.¹⁶ An article in the *Daily Commonwealth*, reported that a "permit to proceed with the fight [Dempsey-Gibbons]

¹⁴ Fred Weller, *Achievements in Fond du Lac during the 1900's* (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 1982), 94.

¹⁵ United States Department of Commerce, Callsign and Station Owner Card Files.

¹⁶ State Historical Society of Wisconsin, License for Land Radio Station.

program at the local broadcasting station was received this morning from S. B. Davis, acting secretary of the Department of Commerce. Mr. Davis gave the station the letters KFIZ.”¹⁷ Even though the official date on the license was July 6, 1923, and the document was recorded as received on July 12, 1923, it can be assumed, from the existence of the newspaper article, that the station had knowledge of the acceptance of its application and had been informed of the new call letters prior to the completion of the official paperwork. This enabled the new KFIZ to notify the public of its new call letters before the actual license was issued. The time period between assigning call letters and issuing a license ranged from immediate action to as long as forty days. According to Department of Commerce records, the time lag was usually in the range of one to three days.¹⁸ As is the case today, radio stations had confirmation about new call letters before the actual paperwork was completed. It should be noted that the call letters KFIZ were assigned to the station by the Department of Commerce.

Today the Federal Communications Commission assigns call letters and licenses, although stations may request individual call letters. Beginning in 1913, the United States government had generally separated the assignment of K and W call letters, the two letters assigned by international agreement to stations located in the United States. The original K/W boundary ran northward from the Mexican border along the eastern borders of New Mexico, Colorado, Wyoming and Montana. However, in late January 1923, the K/W boundary was shifted east to the Mississippi River. With this change, K was assigned to all new licenses west of the Mississippi. Existing stations were allowed to keep their nonstandard designations. A few stations, including KFIZ, originally received the K designation, despite their location east of the boundary. Two other stations, KQV and KYW, both in Pennsylvania, also have a K designation. The “K” call letter is another testament to the age of station KFIZ.¹⁹

The first big broadcast for the new KFIZ took place on July 4, 1923. *The Daily Commonwealth* reported that “Radio fans in Fond du Lac and adjacent counties may tune in their sets tomorrow afternoon and get the Dempsey-Gibbons fight returns round by round from the *Daily Commonwealth*–Dodge Brothers Motor Car Agency broadcasting

¹⁷ *The Daily Commonwealth*, July 3, 1923.

¹⁸ United States Department of Commerce, Callsign and Station Owner Card Files.

¹⁹ United States Department of Commerce, Callsign and Station Owner Card Files.

KFIZ Studio at 18 Forest Avenue in the 1920s

station.”²⁰ Listeners in these early days also heard music, news and other odds and ends, as evidenced by the daily program schedules that regularly appeared in the *Daily Commonwealth* and later the *Commonwealth Reporter*. In the beginning, the owners only operated the station for a few hours a day, at their convenience, and the station was often off the air by 6 p.m. It is likely that Huelsman used the station to promote his Dodge franchise and his DeForrest Radios as well as his Paige, Jewett, Oakland and Star automobiles. This is evidenced by the dealership’s annual car give-away that was probably advertised over KFIZ. This annual event drew large crowds and was attended by people from all over the area.²¹

In 1926 the Reporter Printing Company, which owned the *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, bought the P. B. Haber Printing Company. Haber Printing, in turn, owned *The Daily Commonwealth* and KFIZ radio. On October 1, 1926, the Reporter Printing Company announced that its recent purchase had culminated in that day’s issue of a newspaper formed by the merger of the two previous local papers. *The Daily Commonwealth* and the *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter* became the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*. The article traced the history of the two newspapers and mentioned that one of the assets of the P. B. Haber Company was KFIZ radio.

The job printing plant, formerly part of the Haber properties, will continue to be operated at capacity under the name of the P. B. Haber Printing Company by the new owners, as will radio station KFIZ, which is now in the charges of the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* and will be on the air at the usual hour daily.²²

This article stated that the officers of the Reporter Printing Company, President and General Manager A. H. Lange, Vice-president and Editor C. F. Coffman and Secretary and Treasurer Emery Martin, who collectively had been “connected with the company for more than 20 years, and since 1917 have been in complete control and now are the sole owners of the property,” would now oversee the combined operation of the “new” newspaper, radio station and printing companies.²³

²⁰ *The Daily Commonwealth*, July 3, 1923.

²¹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1926.

²² *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 1, 1926.

²³ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 1, 1926.

Five years later, on March 5, 1931, the Reporter Printing Company established new studios for the station on the second floor of the Commonwealth Reporter Building, located at 18 West First Street. At that time, KFIZ had its power increased to 100 watts, with an antenna erected on top of the building. Both developments were indications of the growing success of the station.²⁴

With the move to new ownership and new studio, schedules for the broadcast day were then published in the *Commonwealth Reporter*, providing a new means for the station to attract listeners. The offerings that were publicized for the broadcast day of March 5, 1931 included the news and sports flashes that began the broadcast day at 5:00 a.m. Subsequent programming was on the air from 12:00 p.m. to 1:00 p.m. and again from 5:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. A musical program featuring “Trixie Troy,” who played the guitar and sang, aired at 5:15, and the “Melody Boys” followed at 5:30. The Children’s Hour lasted from 5:45 until 6:00, when the weather report, sponsored by Tent and Awning Company of Fond du Lac, was broadcast.

From 6:02 until the time signal break at 6:30, there were various musical programs featuring local talents, including A. W. Triggs, the station manager. Each fifteen-minute to thirty-minute block included a different local business that sponsored the station break that stated the call letters and the time. The evening programs that day featured an address by Attorney General John W. Reynolds at 7:32. After 8:00 p.m., the “Knights of the Night,” who had earlier been broadcast from 6:47 to 7:30, appeared again to host a request program until the end of broadcasting, at a time that was not specified.²⁵

Programming at the radio station was a central concern of management and remains a main focus today. In 1932, Al Triggs, the first station manager, was replaced by Lynn Fairbanks. Under Fairbanks’ direction, the station moved into a new era, with the original local talent now supplemented by network shows. This programming mix was maintained to the end of the twentieth century. According to current station owner, Randy Hopper, whose Mountain Dog Media is the parent company of KFIZ radio, the station’s mission statement is “to grow the organization with a foundation built on

²⁴ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

²⁵ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 5, 1931.

integrity, honesty and dedication; to prosper through increased service to the community and to our business partners.”²⁶

From the beginning of its operations to the end of the century, the company managers have consistently believed that this mission statement was manifested in the local programming that the station offered to its listeners. By focusing on issues and events such as local election coverage, high school sports, and providing a venue for charities, service and school organizations to share their activities, along with comprehensive news, information and entertainment that is of local interest, KFIZ’s ownership believed the station provided its listeners with “meaningful” programming. Partnered with selected network programs, such as Mike Gallagher, Mike Segal, and Fox Sports Net, this combination still constituted the station’s format in 2000.²⁷

In recent promotional materials, Mountain Dog Media says of KFIZ, “Generation after generation have depended on News-Talk 1450 KFIZ, ‘The One You Depend On’ for news, weather, sports and agribusiness since KFIZ’s inception in 1922. News-Talk 1450 KFIZ is the foundation on which Mountain Dog Media has been built.”²⁸ Dedication to this purpose is reflected in the logos used by the station. KFIZ’s motto, found below its logo, reads “KFIZ–The One You Depend On” and the KFIZ sports logo reads “The Only Game in Town.” Recently other local stations have begun to cover Fond du Lac sporting events, but in the past KFIZ was the only local station to cover both local and professional sporting events. As a result, the motto “The Only Game in Town” refers to that time and to the idea that KFIZ claims it still provides the most comprehensive local and professional sports coverage.

To promote the local feel of its programming, the station began remote broadcasts in the early 1930s. An exact date is not recorded, but Lynn Fairbanks recollects the content of the first remote broadcast. “I remember our first remote control broadcast that originated from our studios. It came from the former George M. Dugan Funeral Home, with Harvey Millar playing the organ and Joseph Bastian singing.”²⁹ Another early remote broadcast took place in 1933, when local Christmas services were broadcast for

²⁶ KFIZ Radio Files, Mission Statement, October 27, 2000.

²⁷ Randy Hopper Interview, October 27, 2000.

²⁸ KFIZ Radio Files, Promotional Materials for Mountain Dog Media.

²⁹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

*KFIZ Remote Broadcast of Hormel Girls Corps Band and Choir,
Roosevelt Junior High School Auditorium, 1930s*

the first time. Midnight Mass from St. Joseph's Church, celebrated by Reverend Monsignor Henry G. Riordan, pastor, was aired live. Remote broadcasting rapidly became an integral part of station programming. Whether it was coverage of local sporting events, local election returns, or live remotes from various community events such as Farm Progress Days or the Fond du Lac County Fair, KFIZ made a point of getting out and about and letting the community know what was happening in the area.

Early local programs included various types of shows. There were programs especially designed for certain advertisers. Fairbanks, for instance, created "The Chilton Hour," supported by Chilton merchants, along with various programs like "Shut-Ins Church Hour" on Saturday evenings.³⁰ One of the early local performers on the station was Mrs. Lucille Fairbanks, wife of the station manager Lynn Fairbanks. Mrs. Fairbanks, known as Cile, had a daily show where she played listeners' requests on the organ. Mrs. Fairbanks served as the station's program director and staff organist. On July 27, 1937, the station purchased a pump organ, manufactured by the Claugh and Warren Company of Detroit, Michigan, which was the "same type of instrument used in many leading radio stations, churches, schools, mortuary parlors, and homes throughout the country."³¹ This organ, though no longer considered a piece of studio equipment, can still be seen in the studio lobby of KFIZ.

The 1967 Stan Gores article that appeared in the *Commonwealth Reporter* lists some of the entertainers who appeared on KFIZ in 1932. These early programs all featured various types of local entertainment, as network affiliation for the station did not begin until April 18, 1936.³² Listed in the article were "such shows as 'The Percy Duo,' 'Harmony Song Girl,' 'George Mohr's Cowboy Trio,' 'News Flashes by Jay Harlin,' 'Ken and Bill,' 'Household Hints,' 'Farm News,' 'Herbie Zuelsdorf and His Playboys,' 'Arch Adrian and His Orchestra,' 'Warren Lynes with Sports Talk,' 'Elinor Hrabik and Helen Ley with classical selections,' 'Lucille and Jimmy,' 'Barb and Pete and Rubetown Entertainers,' 'The Merchants' Review,' 'Mites of the Mike,' and the hourly time signal."³³ Musical selections were interspersed with news, sports, farm news, and infor-

³⁰ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

³¹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, July 27, 1937.

³² *The Commonwealth Reporter*, April 17, 1936.

³³ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

mational programs. Many of these programs were station fixtures for years. Cile Fairbanks, “The Merchants’ Review”, and “Farm Review,” among others, all appeared on daily programming schedules into the 1940s.³⁴

More recently, local programming that has left a lasting mark on Fond du Lac has included shows such as “The Yawn Patrol,” “The 180 Club,” (morning programs), “The Proscenium,” “Ron Harvey on Record,” “Gazing at Sports,” “Danny the Elf,” “The Swap Shop,” “Party Line,” and “The Josh Krunchmeyer Show.”³⁵ The features that made these local programs endure were the hosts and the connection the content had to the community. For instance, “The Josh Krunchmeyer” show was on the air for almost seven years. Hosts Ron Harvey and Joe Goeser aired the show on Saturdays from 11:30 a.m. until 12:30 p.m. Harvey played the straight man to Goeser’s silly Dutchman character, Josh Krunchmeyer, who was portrayed as a fun-loving world traveler. The program featured polka music along with the two hosts’ humor and down-to-earth chatter that included “zinging” local listeners for fun. Host Joe Goeser recalled that they never really could figure out why people loved the show. When the “Josh Krunchmeyer” show was finally cancelled, because the hosts had become tired of it and were running out of ideas for material, listeners were very sad. While it was on the air, business people would take their lunch hour at airtime in order to enjoy the program. People talked about the show back then and still talk about it today, even years after it left the air. Goeser noted that people still call him Josh Krunchmeyer.³⁶

Recent local programs have included a wide variety of shows in the time-proven format of news, sports and entertainment. Local morning programming featured “The Breakfast Club,” including local news, weather and sports updates, along with network clips such as “The Osgood Files,” “Biography Radio,” and “Bloomberg Market Minute.” Local features included “Birthdays/Anniversaries,” “Fond du Lac Senior Center Report,” “Ripon Chamber of Commerce Report,” “Fife on Fishing,” and “Behind the Badge.” All of these local programs discussed topics of information and concern to area residents.³⁷

³⁴ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 19-27, 1940.

³⁵ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, January 28, 1956.

³⁶ Joe Goeser Interview, December 7, 2000.

³⁷ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

Features in 2000 included midmorning, “Backstage Live,” produced and directed live in the studio and featuring “interviews with top local, regional and national acts including musicians, entertainers, comedians, authors and celebrities.”³⁸ Music ranging from the ’40s to the ’90s was also played. “Viewpoint with Jeff McAndrew,” (replaced by Paul Barbato in 2001), a call-in show devoted to issues that affect Fond du Lac and the area, aired around midday. The evening’s offerings of local programming included “KFIZ Newswatch,” which highlighted the day’s local and national headlines. “Sports-line,” an hour-long show, is the only daily sports talk show in the area that covers everything from high school sports to professional sports.³⁹ Recently, more network programming from FOX Sports has been featured. On Sunday mornings, there is still a local church-related program. This feature of religious broadcasting has been evident at KFIZ in some fashion during its entire history of operation. From the “Shut-Ins Church Hour” in the 1920s to various religious programs, including “The Family Rosary,” in 1965, to the current news and church programming, this continuity reflects the importance to the local community of religious broadcasts on the local station, although the current schedule includes much less religious material than was the case in the past.

KFIZ has prided itself not only on its locally produced shows but on its ability effectively to intersperse network programs in the daily schedule. Network presentations bring to the community information that deals with topics from a national viewpoint. Such broadcasts have typically been national news, sports, or entertainment features that have ranged from musical or dramatic presentations to talk-radio format programs. Recent offerings have included such nationally well-known individuals as Charles Osgood, Martha Stewart, and Matt Drudge. These recently expanded network broadcasts, current KFIZ ownership believes, have enhanced the scope of information that the station provides to its listeners. Airing these nationally focused programs to the Fond du Lac community has given KFIZ the dual ability to inform and serve the community on local topics of concern as well as bring a view of the world to Wisconsin in a format that is meaningful to local listeners.

³⁸ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

³⁹ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

This history of network partnership began for KFIZ on Saturday April 18, 1936, when KFIZ became associated with the Affiliated Broadcasting Company (ABC). This affiliation was a significant boost for KFIZ programming, and it was heavily promoted by the station's parent company, Reporter Printing, which also owned the newspaper. On April 17, 1936, the *Commonwealth Reporter* ran a large article on the affiliation, which included the new network schedule that was to start the next day. On Saturday, April 18, 1936, a full-page ad appeared in the same newspaper that said "Congratulations KFIZ on ABC Hook-Up." This page included another copy of the new daily schedule as well as many congratulatory advertisements from local business.⁴⁰ The purpose of the partnership was explained as:

Dedicated to the purpose of making available to the midwestern audience, through local stations, a full schedule of entertaining and instructive programs, the ABC network reaches out from the Chicago loop to the Twin Cities on the north, Evansville on the southeast and St. Louis on the southwest, carrying programs to the 20-member stations and through them to the great Midwest group of listeners.⁴¹

The *Commonwealth Reporter* went on to describe some of the new programming that would now be available to KFIZ listeners. The opening schedule contained women's programs dealing with foods, fashion and feminine concerns, music and drama for the children, a play-by-play account of a Chicago Cubs' game direct from Wrigley Field, a half-dozen assorted dramatic presentations ranging from farce to tragedy, a sports summary, dramatizations of the day's news highlights and a number of authoritative speakers on various subjects.⁴²

In September 1937, a more regional association followed the affiliation with ABC. The *Commonwealth Reporter* reported on August 12, 1937, that representatives of KFIZ, WHBY of Green Bay and WIBU of Poynette had come together to organize an independent radio network including these stations. "The new network will be known as the Wisconsin Broadcasting System. The stations will interchange programs and the system will immediately seek sponsors for radio time. Plans have been made to eventually extend the network from Green Bay, to Wausau, Eau Claire and Minneapolis and

⁴⁰ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, April 18, 1936.

⁴¹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

⁴² *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

from Poynette to Janesville, Racine and Milwaukee.⁴³ This association continues to exist today. Now called the Wisconsin Broadcasters Association, membership includes 35 television and 290 radio stations in Wisconsin.

Over the years various networks and services have provided national news and other programming to KFIZ. After ABC, the station joined the Mutual Broadcasting System. Other networks and national providers with which KFIZ has affiliated have included the Associated Press, CNN, FOX Sports, and Mutual Broadcasting. Currently KFIZ has returned to CNN.⁴⁴ KFIZ is one of only five Wisconsin stations using the National Association of Farm Broadcasters (NAFB). This service gives KFIZ the ability to broadcast more extensive farm news than most other stations can provide.⁴⁵

One very important aspect of KFIZ local programming has been its sports coverage. This tradition began from the very earliest broadcasts. The first program broadcast by the station, while using the call letters KFIZ, was the “Dempsey-Gibbons fight returns round by round” on July 4 1923.⁴⁶ In 1935, KFIZ started broadcasting the home basketball games of Goodrich High School.⁴⁷ This began a long tradition of local sports broadcasting. Joe Goeser, long time employee of KFIZ, and for many years a radio sports announcer, noted that for 25 years KFIZ broadcast Fond du Lac Youth Baseball games. Each week a different team was featured, and this show was a hit with parents, grandparents and friends. Goeser also noted that, sometimes, local sporting events were so well attended that people who could not obtain tickets had to listen to the game on the radio. Every type of game was covered, and people would say that, if KFIZ was not there to cover a game, then it wasn’t worth attending.⁴⁸ One example of how KFIZ backed local sports was a 1952 fundraiser intended to aid the financially troubled local minor league baseball franchise.

The old Fond du Lac Panthers baseball team in the Wisconsin State Leagues nearly lost the local franchise because of dwindling receipts; the station remained on the air until nearly 4 a.m. to get about \$8000 from residents to help keep the team ‘alive.’⁴⁹

⁴³ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, August 12, 1937.

⁴⁴ Joe Goeser Interview, December 7, 2000.

⁴⁵ Jerry St. John (KFIZ morning broadcaster) Interview, October 16, 2000.

⁴⁶ *The Daily Commonwealth*, July 3, 1923.

⁴⁷ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

⁴⁸ Joe Goeser Interview, December 7, 2000.

⁴⁹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

KFIZ covered local sports, but through its network affiliations the station has also been able to bring national sports to the area. In 1936, when the station became an affiliate of the ABC network, listeners were able to listen to “a play-by-play account of the Cubs game direct from Wrigley Field.”⁵⁰ On February 12, 1954, the *Commonwealth Reporter* announced that:

All games of the Milwaukee Braves will be broadcast over radio station KFIZ during the coming major leagues season. There will be 90 daytime games and 60 nighttime games.⁵¹ In addition to carrying the regular season broadcasts, a score of exhibition games between the Braves and other major league teams will be broadcast beginning in March.⁵²

KFIZ even received recognition from the Braves organization in December 1956 for promoting Braves games on the radio. The station was one of two winners of a promotional contest for Braves network stations in a four-state area.⁵³

Today, KFIZ is Fond du Lac’s local source for Green Bay Packers football, Milwaukee Brewers baseball, Milwaukee Bucks basketball and Wisconsin Badgers Sports. KFIZ was the very first Milwaukee Brewers affiliate and one of the first Green Bay Packers affiliates. During the football season, KFIZ brings the NFL to the air on Sundays, and “Monday Night Football” is broadcast via the CBS Radio Network.⁵⁴

During its years of broadcasting, KFIZ has had a number of personalities behind the microphone and in the studios. Some have been local people who became household names, such as Lynn and Cile Fairbanks, Al Triggs, Ron Harvey, Joe Goeser, and Doug McGrath. Others began their careers in Fond du Lac and moved on to work in larger markets elsewhere in the country. Fahey Flynn was an announcer for KFIZ in late 1938, after he had graduated from the Oshkosh State Teachers College. Flynn won many awards for newscasting with WBBM and CBS in Chicago and eventually became principal anchor on the WLS-TV nightly news.⁵⁵ Jonathon Brantmeier, Cal Culver, Al Sampson, Jim Lawler and Dick Weidenbruch were all early announcers who spent part of

⁵⁰ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, April 17, 1936.

⁵¹ The 1954 Major League Baseball season consisted of 154 games. Four may not have been broadcast, but there are no surviving station logs to verify how many games were actually broadcast.

⁵² *The Commonwealth Reporter*, February 12, 1954.

⁵³ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, December 5, 1956.

⁵⁴ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

⁵⁵ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

their careers at KFIZ and then moved on to broadcast in other parts of the country.⁵⁶ In the year 2000, personalities included Jerry St. John, Jeff McAndrew, Chuck Friemund and Joe Sheibinger. These individuals continued the KFIZ tradition of broadcasting a mix of news, weather, sports and entertainment.⁵⁷

Over the years the studios for KFIZ have seen various homes. The original location of the station, as previously mentioned, was on the third floor of the Haber Printing Company building at 18 Forest Avenue. Five years after the Reporter Printing Company purchased the station, in 1926, the studios moved in March 1931 to the second floor of the Commonwealth Reporter building, located at 18 West First Street in Fond du Lac. At this time the newspaper reported that

a full complement of modern broadcasting equipment was installed in a sound-proof room. The equipment installed will give KFIZ a dependable range and will greatly improve broadcasting facilities.”⁵⁸

Power at that time was also increased to 100 watts, and a 154-foot antenna was erected on top of the building.⁵⁹

The year 1946 saw another extensive remodeling project that included installation of new equipment and improvements in the studios and offices of the station in its current location, 254 Winnebago Drive.⁶⁰ In December 1954, *The Commonwealth Reporter* published an article that informed the community of the radio station’s successful bid to have a new antenna approved by the FCC. Permission was given to the station’s owner to erect a new 340-foot tower on West Scott Street. The tower would enable the station to continue use of the frequency of 1450 and broadcasts would have the power of 250 watts, day and night. Along with the new tower, the owners installed new transmitter equipment in a building at the new site on Scott Street.⁶¹ The tower was completed by December 16, 1954, with final testing taking another two to three weeks. A. H. Lange, President of KFIZ Broadcasting, stated that listeners could expect better reception within 30 days.⁶² In October 1966, the FCC approved a power increase for the station to 1,000

⁵⁶ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 24, 1967.

⁵⁷ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

⁵⁸ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, March 4, 1931.

⁵⁹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, September 7, 1938, March 24, 1967.

⁶⁰ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, December 18, 1947.

⁶¹ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, December 7, 1954.

⁶² *The Commonwealth Reporter*, December 16, 1954.

watts. This increased the quality of the AM transmissions.⁶³ This tower is still in use today and operates at 1,000 watts.

In the early 1970s, KFIZ studios were moved to 307 North Main Street. 1979 saw a move to 254 Winnebago Drive, a former Sentry grocery store, then down the road in 1988 to 103 West Scott Street. Finally, in 1995, KFIZ moved back to its current home at 254 Winnebago Drive.⁶⁴ These moves corresponded to changes in ownership that KFIZ experienced during those years. In 1972, Don Jones bought KFIZ, and he owned the business for fifteen years. Jones sold the station to Independence Broadcasting of New York in late 1987.⁶⁵ Independence Broadcasting owned KFIZ until 1993, when Don Jones and Randy Hopper of Lakeside Broadcasting bought KFIZ and FM station WFON, later re-licensed as KFIZ-FM.⁶⁶ The most recent change of ownership occurred in January 1997, when KFIZ was purchased from Don Jones by Randy Hopper, now of Yellow Dog Broadcasting, a division of Mountain Dog Media. With new technological advances, KFIZ implemented a fresh mode of presentation, and the station can be accessed on the Internet through the station website, www.kfiz.com.

One of Wisconsin's oldest AM radio stations, KFIZ, from its inception to the end of the twentieth century, held to a philosophy that it is a community radio station. The idea of local programming and service to the Fond du Lac community was the cornerstone of operational philosophy. By providing the community with timely news, weather, sports, agribusiness and entertainment, KFIZ carved out a place in the minds of Fond du Lac County residents as the source of accurate local information. In times of bad weather, breaking news and joyful experiences, KFIZ provided information to those who needed to know or who could not be there. Owners and station managers over the years remained true to this idea of serving the community.

Originally, KFIZ's purpose was to help sell cars, which at that time were as novel as was the radio used to advertise them. Sales of commercial advertisements and promotion of radio continue to be key elements in the success of the radio station. Ownership by a group that published the local newspaper provided KFIZ with a format to

⁶³ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, October 15, 1966.

⁶⁴ KFIZ Website, www.kfiz.com.

⁶⁵ *The Commonwealth Reporter*, September 15, 1987.

⁶⁶ Randy Hopper Interview; Federal Communications Commission, www.fcc.gov.

promote daily schedules and keep the public informed about changes at the station. For a few years, KFIZ stood relatively alone as an independent media outlet. Today, it is the flagship operation of a company that owns multiple radio stations, a small newspaper, and a sign company, all of which have connections to the Internet. The public purpose of KFIZ has always been to entertain, to inform and to serve Fond du Lac County and the surrounding areas. With the support of the various multimedia resources of the parent company, KFIZ continued its long tradition of community service in new ways that had not always been possible before. The twin traditions of innovation and community service have combined in a business plan that has encouraged and sustained a loyal Fond du Lac listenership from the early 1920s to the present.

