

**HISTORY BY THE LAKE:
STUDIES IN THE HISTORY OF FOND DU LAC
AND THE LAKE WINNEBAGO REGION**

Clarence B. Davis, Ph.D. Editor

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**In memory of Tori (1969-1984) and of Brit (1990-2004):
The best and most loving of friends.**

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All Photographs, unless otherwise stated, appear through courtesy of the Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

PREFACE

This volume is the second in a series of occasional papers devoted to study of the local history of the Fond du Lac and Lake Winnebago region. The earlier volume, *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, concentrated exclusively on Fond du Lac, because it was presented as a part of a sesquicentennial celebration.¹ The present volume incorporates some essays that did not fit that earlier format as well as others completed since it appeared, and so the new book is cast in terms of the broader Lake Winnebago region of which Fond du Lac is an important part.

Each of the essays has been produced by a Marian College student enrolled in the History Program, the Political Science Program, or the Broad Field Social Studies Program. The essay is the capstone experience for these majors. Students undertaking this course, customarily completed in three segments over a period of at least three semesters, are strongly encouraged to pursue topics in local history or politics because of the availability of primary sources and their convenience of access. Since many of the students plan careers in education, there is also often a direct linkage between their research and material that they will be able to use in the classroom. Local topics also make good practical sense, because few students possess the time or resources to travel to more distant collections. Local history has also come into its own as a legitimate part of the historical studies landscape, and essays on local topics such as these will provide useful insights for historians who will write the more synthetic works on Wisconsin's history in the future. At the very least, the work of these students will leave Fond du Lac and the Lake Winnebago region with the rich legacy of a past that has been remembered, understood, and interpreted

The intent of the capstone assignment is that students should produce an original essay that makes a contribution to historical understanding, that utilizes significant primary sources and that conforms to the high standard of technical production characteristic of essays produced by professional historians. The range of topics that the students represented in this volume have chosen is impressive, reflecting a broad

¹ Claence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Action Printing, 2002).

spectrum of student interests that spans political issues, military affairs, economic development, social customs, leisure, education, religious life, and historical ecology. Some of the essays reflect an interest in current public policy issues. In such a project, the process of research and writing is inevitably a shared one. Students work in small seminar groups, sharing their research and issues with the instructor and one another. Teaching is a mutual process, with students developing expertise that is imparted to an instructor who does not specialize in local history, or for that matter American history, while students learn the craft of the practicing historian.

At the core of any project such as this are library archives and the help of the librarians who sustain them and make them usable. Wisconsin is admirably served by its well-organized and professionally staffed historical archives, and students have benefited by having available to them the Cardinal Meyer Library at Marian College, the Public Library of the City of Fond du Lac, the Fond du Lac County Historical Society's Adams House research unit, the State Historical Society of Wisconsin at Madison, and its Area Resource Center at the University of Wisconsin Oshkosh, all of which have been utilized in the production of these essays, as have certain other archives that are not open to the general public, including, among others, those of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, Saint Mary's Springs High School, and the Congregation of Saint Agnes. Many of the essays also incorporate the results of oral history investigations.

This work is a collaborative one to which many people not listed as authors have also made a contribution. Several people deserve acknowledgement for their significant roles in its production. Mary Ellen Gormican, Director, and Sarah Sturke, Reference and Bibliographic Instruction Librarian at the Cardinal Meyer Library at Marian, both assisted students in obtaining needed materials and helped begin their education as researchers. Sally Albertz of the Fond du Lac County Historical Society provided extensive research assistance through her encyclopedic knowledge of the collections at the Adams House research facility, and she helped identify appropriate photographs. Mary Georgeff of the State Historical Society of Wisconsin provided much help to students in navigating the massive collection of materials located in Madison, a task more recently undertaken by Rick Pifer and other staff members at the State Historical Society.

My colleagues in the History Program, including Dr. Richard Whaley, Dr. Mary Gross, Sister Marie Scott, CSA, and Father Ron Jansch, OFM Cap. all contributed to this project, suggesting topics, providing research materials, offering insights into the historiography of Wisconsin, reading and commenting on essays, and attending presentations of completed student research. They also read this manuscript and offered suggestions for its improvement. Father Ron deserves special mention for his unequalled skills as a proofreader, as does Dr. Mary Gross for her work on the cover design. Sister Margaret Lorimer, CSA, emerita professor of history at Marian College and historian of the Congregation of Saint Agnes, provided invaluable information on topics related to the Agnesians in Fond du Lac and Nicaragua. Mrs. Lisa McArthur, Secretary for the Social and Behavioral Sciences Division, provided typing and manuscript production assistance. Mr. Jeff Kuhnz of Action Printing provided assistance in production of the book. But the main credit for this volume belongs to the eighteen authors whose work appears here.

This volume represents a shared project in other ways. Funding to support its production has been provided by the Fond du Lac Public Library through its Bernice and Robert Seefeld Fund, for which I thank Mr. Ken Hall, Director, by 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 continuing supporters of this project. Special acknowledgement must be made of the support and encouragement of Dr. Larry Robinson, Dean of the Marian College School of Education and of Professor Michelle Majewski, Director of the Social Science Research Institute at Marian College.

The value of this book as a contribution to understand the history of Fond du Lac and the Lake Winnebago region is due to the work of the authors of the individual articles and the efforts of the many people listed above. Although this is a work of many hands, the defects that remain are, I confess, the result of my own limitations as an editor.

Clarence B. Davis, Ph.D.
Fond du Lac, Wisconsin
December 17, 2004

The Emergence of a Professional Sheriff's Office in Winnebago County, 1920-2000

Jason S. Walter

On March 14, 1938, at approximately one-thirty in the morning, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office broadcast a warning bulletin over the WAKE (police radio) communication system to be on the lookout for a stolen car. The automobile was stolen in Waupaca shortly after one o'clock in the morning. In a little over an hour the vehicle was recovered, and an Outagamie County Sheriff's Deputy apprehended the driver. This apprehension was made possible by the WAKE communication system, spanning four counties: Winnebago, Outagamie, Waupaca, and Fond du Lac. The bulletin alerted Winnebago County and Outagamie County Sheriff's Deputies to block the highway leading into Winnebago and Outagamie Counties from Waupaca. In this case, the driver decided to head for Outagamie County, where a reception committee of Outagamie County Sheriff's Deputies awaited him.¹

With modern police technology and communications, such events are commonplace; however, in the 1930s the arrest was a monumental achievement, the culmination of a number of different technological developments that helped to revolutionize the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office during the period 1920 to 1950. The development of this police technology was not without many complications, complications that also pointed up glaring weaknesses in the effectiveness of law enforcement. For example, by 1950, Winnebago County Sheriff's Deputies were connected by two-way radio communication with both the dispatcher and with other officers in their squad cars. Once officers left their squad cars, however, they were out of communication. While some law enforcement agencies had begun to use portable radios, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office did not introduce these devices until the late 1970s, and even then, portable radios were not made available to every officer, due to their high cost. Generally, the higher-ranking officers, such as patrol sergeants and lieutenants, were issued the new technology earlier than the patrol officers. This

¹ Clara and William Dawes, *History of Oshkosh* (Oshkosh, Wisconsin: Morgan Company, 1938), 113.

communication gap caused many problems for officers, as illustrated by the experience of Deputy James Goggins, now Chief Deputy in the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office.

On October 31, 1977, while Deputy Goggins was taking an accident report, he was called on his squad radio by the patrol sergeant and told to check on another accident that had involved possible injuries. As Deputy Goggins approached the scene, he noticed a rolled-over, empty vehicle. He then noticed an individual coming out of the ditch on the other side of the road. To the Deputy's surprise, the man got into Goggins' squad car and drove away. The squad car had been left running, because that was the only way to keep the two-way radio and red light on the squad car operational. With his squad car stolen, Deputy Goggins could not communicate with other officers or dispatch. Shocked and worried about losing his job, Goggins commandeered a red Ford Mustang from a passer-by and went after his squad car. The pursuit ended when the individual, who had stopped at a local tavern, was arrested. The man who had stolen the squad car had also stolen the vehicle that had rolled over.²

The adoption of police technology by the sheriff's office laid the foundation for the sheriff's office to provide professional and efficient police services. While the sheriff's office was being transformed by new technologies, from the use of motorcycles and automobiles in the 1920s to the development of two-way radio communications in the 1930s and 1940s, the sheriff's role was also evolving into its modern form, driven in part by the need to adapt the office to the new technology and also by the increase in numbers and specialization of staff under the sheriff's direction.

Developments in technology certainly revolutionized the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office through redefining the sheriff's role, increasing professionalism, and requiring specialization, all of which ultimately led to an increase in training and education. The new technologies also created some tension between the sheriff's office and the public, primarily because technology dramatically increased public expectations of the sheriff's office.

² Interview with James Goggins, December 14, 2000.

The first sheriff of Winnebago County, N.P. Tuttle, was elected in 1847, a year before Wisconsin became a state.³ From Tuttle's time in office to the fifty-fifth sheriff, Michael Brooks, there was tremendous growth and change within the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office. The sheriff's position was created out of necessity. Laws and statutes needed to be enforced, and the position of sheriff was established to accomplish this goal.

The office of sheriff emerged in medieval England during the reign of William I, "the Conqueror". Each "shire" or county was administered by a representative of the King known as a "reeve," usually a baron who was a supporter of the King. These officials had absolute power within their jurisdiction. Over time the "Shire Reeve" came to be known as the county sheriff.⁴ The sheriff's duties included collecting taxes, organizing the militia, serving papers such as writs, and judging criminal and civil cases.⁵

The sheriff's role diminished after the reign of William I. King Henry II redefined the sheriff's role to assume more law enforcement functions. The sheriff's duties included apprehending criminals, keeping lists of fugitives, building jails, and hiring special jailers and executioners. By the reign of Queen Elizabeth I, many of the sheriff's duties had been transferred to new offices such as constable and justice of the peace.⁶

The office of sheriff did not take root in America until after the American Revolution, when the sheriff emerged in the frontier West. Before the Civil War, sheriffs were generally appointed and exercised a wide range of powers, including collecting taxes, apprehending criminals, conducting elections, and maintaining the local jail.⁷ During the early nineteenth century, the position of sheriff evolved to fit the social conditions, political ideology, and justice system emerging in the new country. New law enforcement agencies emerged at city, county, and state levels, changing the American sheriff's role by taking duties and responsibilities previously under the sheriff's direction.

³ Clinton Karstaedt, *Oshkosh: One Hundred Years of a City* (Oshkosh: Castle-Pierce Printing Company, 1953), 113.

⁴ George Kosalos, "An Historical Approach to The Office of Sheriff," *Wisconsin Sheriff and Deputy Magazine*, December (1965), XVII: 22.

⁵ Larry A. Giddings, Mark Furstenberg, and Henry J. Noble, "The Sheriff descendant of an ancient tradition," *Wisconsin Law Enforcement Journal*, (Summer 1971), 37.

⁶ Donald C. Simmons, Jr., *American Justice v. III* (New Jersey: Salem Press, 1996), 727.

⁷ *Ibid.*

On April 20, 1836, an Act of Congress established the Territory of Wisconsin, and Henry Dodge was appointed governor of the territory. At this time there were only six counties in the Territory of Wisconsin. An act of the territorial legislature passed on January 6, 1840 created Winnebago County and set it apart from Brown County. However, Winnebago County remained attached to Brown County for judicial purposes until February 22, 1845. Also in 1845, the legislature passed an act locating the county seat for Winnebago County. The commissioners had selected Butte des Morts as the seat, but local citizens objected, and the legislature settled the issue by placing the county seat in what is now Oshkosh. Influential in this decision were the actions of L.W. Miller, Samuel H. Fornsworth and Sewell A. Wolcott, who donated ten lots of land located in the area now bounded by Court, Ceape, and Otter streets in the City of Oshkosh for public use.⁸

On August 7, 1848, Alexander W. Stone was elected Winnebago County's first circuit judge.⁹ The first session of the circuit court of Winnebago County was held at the schoolhouse in the village of Oshkosh, but the county soon decided to build a courthouse and jail. Under the act of February 8, 1847, the first courthouse of Winnebago County was built, and the first term of court was held there April 9, 1849.¹⁰

During the period from 1847 to 1920, Winnebago County sheriffs had many duties. According to Wisconsin State Statutes the sheriff was to keep and preserve the peace in the county, quiet and suppress all affrays, riots, unlawful assemblies and insurrections, provide for the service of processes in civil and criminal cases, apprehend or secure any person for felony or for a breach of peace, provide maintenance of persons kept within the County Jail, and in addition, transport inmates to the various institutions to which they are committed.¹¹ But the sheriff's main duty was the operation of the jail.

⁸ Charles Forward, *History: Winnebago County Wisconsin - Its Cities, Towns, Resources, People, v. 1* (Chicago: C.F. Cooper and Company, 1908), 538-541.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 541.

¹⁰ D.E. McDonald, "History of County, Prepared by Judge, Put in Cornerstone," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 30, 1927, 3.

¹¹ Wisconsin State Statutes, Chapter 53 Counties, 59.27(1) Sheriff Duties, 59.28(1) Peace maintenance; powers and duties, 59.29 Transportation apprehension of criminals. (1999-2000).

Sheriffs in this period typically did not have any full-time deputies. Instead, the sheriff relied heavily on community consensus and the willingness of citizens to assist.¹² To aid the sheriff in his duties, the county provided a residence for the sheriff and his family that was attached to the County Jail. The residence was often seen as a fringe benefit; however, it primarily assured that the sheriff's services would be available around the clock.

Throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it was commonly believed that the sheriff's position was an easy, lucrative job. However, Sheriff Madison Rounds stated in 1907 that had he known what a poor-paying office it was, he would have saved his money and gone into business instead of spending his money campaigning for the office.¹³ Sheriff Rounds' statement was well founded, because the sheriff was not paid a large salary. Instead, he was paid by a system of piecework for certain activities and functions. For example, the sheriff was paid for serving papers and processing warrants, and sheriffs were often reimbursed for expenses incurred while performing duties.

In the early years of the sheriff's office, the main moneymaker for the sheriff was the operation of the jail, because he received a set dollar amount for each prisoner housed there. Usually the sheriff's wife cooked meals for the prisoners, and if the meals cost less than the sheriff was paid for each prisoner, the sheriff kept the remainder. Obviously, it was in the sheriff's best interest that the jail remain occupied as nearly at full capacity as possible and that the prisoners not be fed lavishly.¹⁴

Normally, establishment of a courthouse also meant building a jail. By 1871, forty-eight of the fifty-eight Wisconsin counties had built both courthouses with attached jails. Winnebago County was no different; and not until 1980 were the county jail and

¹² Wilbur Miller, "The Historical Background to Law Enforcement in the United States," *History Today*, (August 2000), 29.

¹³ Anonymous, "County Law Officers Article," unpublished manuscript, Winnebago County Sheriff's Office Historical Collection, maintained by Deputy Kyle Holewinski.

¹⁴ See several newspaper articles available in *The Paper* and *Oshkosh Northwestern*. Jay Berger, "Sheriff favors reorganization of county jail operations," *The Paper*, June 21, 1968, 4. Judy Serwe, "Bill bans meal profit from sheriff's salary," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 26, 1987, 9. Barbara A. Schmitz, "Sheriff awarded jail food contract," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 6, 1989.

sheriff's office physically separated from the county courthouse. Nevertheless, growth of the county forced rapid change in the courthouses and jails, a pattern that persisted.

The first courthouse in Oshkosh was completed on February 8, 1847, and the jail was built in 1848 for \$300, with citizens subscribing \$200 and the county providing the remainder. The jail was 14 feet wide and 28 feet long, and it was built of oak lumber walls with floors 12 inches thick. The first courthouse was quickly outgrown, and it was soon replaced by a new structure, completed in 1854 at a cost of \$1885. As the community grew, additional wings were added, and alterations were made to accommodate the requirements of the expanding government. It is unclear if another jail was built to accompany the second courthouse, but it seems likely that the sheriff continued to utilize the first jail.¹⁵

The third courthouse in Oshkosh was built in 1859 at a cost of \$19,680. The jail and the sheriff's residence were located in the basement of this structure. The building itself was a large and imposing structure, three stories high, and it remained in use until 1937. The early jails of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office were used only to house offenders during the period between arrest and trial, or trial and sentencing, not as places of rehabilitation.¹⁶

There was considerable discussion about a new courthouse and jail during the early 1920s. The sheriff was one of the major players in the debate, due to the fact that his office was beginning to outgrow the cramped basement of the courthouse. The principal reason for this was that the role of the sheriff's office continued to expand. The greatest change came in 1920, and it completely revolutionized the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, not to mention the whole of American society: the advent of the automotive age.

From 1900 to 1930, the number of automobile registrations in the United States rose from 8,000 to more than 23,000,000. This resulted in people and businesses moving

¹⁵ See D.E. McDonald, 3; Forward, 190; "Present Courthouse Is Third In County History," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 19, 1953. See also *A Commemorative Booklet of the New Winnebago County Courthouse*, (Oshkosh: Wisconsin, 1938), 16, a copy of which is located at the Oshkosh Public Library: Winnebago County Historical Collection.

¹⁶ A.E. Hedke, "County Clerk Traces Complete History of Courthouse Movement," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, July 30, 1937, 5. Also see "Present Courthouse is Third in County History."

out of the cities and into surrounding areas, thus transforming what had been rural into suburban areas and promoting urban sprawl. While this process of suburbanization and the physical separation of social classes had begun prior to the introduction of the automobile, its spread was further accelerated by the automobile, as an enormous amount of land thus became available for urban and suburban development.¹⁷ These developments profoundly changed the way law enforcement agencies operated.

In 1920, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office introduced the use of a motorcycle to form its first motor patrol.¹⁸ The motorcycle and later the patrol car were the most visible signs of changes in policing; however, their potential was only fully realized when two-way communication could be established between officers in their cars and dispatch officials at headquarters.

Of course sheriffs had used transport earlier. The earliest land "vehicle" used in law enforcement throughout the United States was the horse.¹⁹ Early law enforcement officers considered horses as their primary transportation. Horses were also used to pull wooden wagons, sometimes referred to as "paddy wagons," that were basically mobile jail cells used to pick up prisoners who had been arrested by foot patrol officers. In 1895, the New York Police Department developed a "scorcher" squad, made up of twenty-five men who rode high-speed bicycles.²⁰ Even though the first successful gasoline powered automobile in the United States had been developed in 1893 by the Duryea brothers, the primary function of the scorcher squad at first was to handle problems created by high-speed carriages.

Beginning in the 1920s, local police departments gradually converted from various other types of conveyance to automobile patrols. Although, the New York City Police Department and others in large cities soon were utilizing automobiles, the vast majority of policing was still done by men on foot. In 1915, ninety-one per cent of

¹⁷ James F. Richardson, *Urban Police in the United States* (New York: National University Publications, 1974), 108.

¹⁸ "County Motor Police Patrol 896 Miles of Area's Roads," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, June 26, 1953, 40.

¹⁹ Monty McCord, *Police Cars: A Photographic History* (Iola, Wisconsin: Krause Publication, Inc., 1991), 10.

²⁰ *The Police Car: In the Pursuit of Justice*, prod. and dir. Michael Rose, 60 min., The History Channel, 1997, videocassette.

patrols in U. S. cities with populations over 30,000 were policed was on foot.²¹ Foot patrol was relatively effective primarily because it gave officers the opportunity to become acquainted with the particular needs of the area they patrolled. The primary weakness of foot patrol was that it did not allow quick response, and it limited the amount of area an officer could cover. It must be pointed out that foot patrol also contributed to a lack of professionalism among police officers during the early twentieth century. There was very little supervision, and this led to corruption of some officers.

One functional weakness of all patrols during the early twentieth century was lack of communication. Today's law enforcement personnel use squad radios, portable radios, cell phones, and mobile data terminals to keep in contact with one another, supervisors, and dispatchers. Early twentieth century police officers had few means of communication. Police officers often had to resort to beating their wooden nightsticks against the pavement or blowing whistles to gain attention and assistance.²²

During the late 1800s a new communication system was developed in Chicago by the Gamewell telephone and telegraph company.²³ The Gamewell boxes were equipped with telephones and were installed at various places throughout a city. Police officers used the boxes primarily to communicate with police headquarters. Usual departmental policy required that officers call headquarters every hour to check in for news or assignments. Gamewell call boxes can still be found in some Wisconsin cities, including Oshkosh and Milwaukee. However, most sheriffs, including Winnebago County's, did not benefit from the largely urban call boxes, for they were normally located outside the county's patrol area.

As automobiles became common, many police departments began to redistribute their men from foot patrol to automobile patrol. The first automobile used in law enforcement was probably used to carry men to patrol posts or to convey prisoners arrested by foot patrol officers. It appears that the first use of motorcycles by police

²¹ Elmer D. Graper, *American Police Administration: A Handbook on Police Organization and Methods of Administration in American Cities* (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1921), 130.

²² Miller, 32.

²³ William J. Bopp, Donald O. Schultz, and Charles C. Thomas, *A Short History of American Law Enforcement* (Illinois, 1972), 67.

occurred in 1909, when Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, Omaha, Nebraska, and Houston, Texas became the first police departments to use the vehicles.²⁴

The Winnebago County Sheriff's Office started its first motor patrol by hiring one motorcycle officer in 1920. Arno Reinke of Winneconne was the first county officer. He was appointed by the Road and Bridge Committee of the County Board for a period from May 1, 1920 to November 1, 1920. In 1923, the county added another patrol officer, and one additional man was hired in 1924 to bring the total number of county motor officers to three. The additional officers were required as the number of automobiles grew and the number of miles of paved county roads and highways increased.²⁵

The three patrol officers working in 1924 were Walter Plummer (who became sheriff in 1926), William Dallaway, and Floyd Bradley. The county was divided into three patrol sections, one for each man. Each officer worked a section for a week and then rotated. Section One included the Oshkosh to Fond du Lac Road, the Oshkosh to Ripon highway and the Oshkosh to Waukau Road. Section Two included Oshkosh to Omro to Wautoma, Omro to Berlin, Omro to Winneconne, Oshkosh to Butte des Morts, and Winchester to Fremont. Section Three included Oshkosh to Neenah to Menasha to Appleton, Waverly Beach, Gillingham's Corners north to the county line, Menasha to Winchester, Menasha to Mikesville and the River Road.²⁶

In 1927, it was reported that the job of county officer was an attractive one. There were 27 applicants for the positions that were filled every year. It is unclear whether applicants underwent any testing process or if they even had interviews. Returning county officers were paid \$225 a month, while first year officers made \$175 per month. County Officers worked at least 60 hours a week, with each officer allowed one day off per week, but no two officers could take off the same day. The officers did not have a particular schedule so they had some discretion as to where and when to patrol. They were required to work all Sundays and holidays.²⁷

²⁴ McCord, 11.

²⁵ Information on the early patrol division can be found in newspaper articles from the *Oshkosh Northwestern*. "County Motor Police Patrol 896 Miles of Area's Roads", 40. "Rural Roads Soon to be Patrolled," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, April 11, 1924, 1.

²⁶ "Rural Roads Soon to be Patrolled," 1.

²⁷ "Motorcops Are Chosen," *Oshkosh Northwestern* January 9, 1926. Also see "Select County Speed Officers," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 15, 1927.

By 1933, the motor patrol division included four officers, each of whom was required to furnish a squad car or motorcycle. Squad cars were basically ordinary automobiles equipped with a red light and one-way radio to receive communication. The county paid operating expenses for the squad cars and furnished the radios. The radio system, known as WAKE, was one of the first police radio systems in Wisconsin. Its major problem was that there was no way to know whether the squad had received a message. Nevertheless, the WAKE communication system broadcast 588 calls for service during January 1938. The Winnebago County Sheriff's Office and the City of Oshkosh Police Department used the radio system the most, with 85 calls made for the Winnebago Sheriff's Office and 268 calls for the Oshkosh Police Department. Most importantly, the WAKE system laid the foundation for future communication developments, because it proved effective in preventing crime and in apprehending criminals. The system was particularly beneficial for the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office when handling automobile accidents, pursuing speeders, and apprehending reckless drivers.²⁸

By 1937, there were more than 21,000 automobiles registered in Winnebago County, an increase of 757 over the 1936 total and 1,877 more than in 1935. A result of these increased numbers was an increasing number of accidents and traffic problems. There were 569 reported automobile accidents in 1937, and those accidents resulted in 25 fatalities, 349 injuries, and 685 cars damaged.²⁹

In 1940, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office realized the full potential of an automobile patrol as it initiated two-way communications. With the two-way system, a dispatcher could contact squad cars, and the deputies could confirm receipt of messages. In December 1949, the sheriff's office underwent yet another change, when it converted its radio system to KSA 765.³⁰ This system incorporated all the prior advancements and allowed the deputies to communicate with one another without having the radio operator take part in any of the conversations. By 1950, it was a common occurrence for members of the public use the telephone to call the sheriff's office for assistance and for sheriff's

²⁸ For statistics on the WAKE system, see: Clara and William Dawes, 113-115. This information is supported by Karstaedt, 73-74 and "County Motor police Patrol 896 Miles of Area's Roads," 40.

²⁹ Clara Dawes and William Dawes, 113-114.

deputies to respond to the call. But perhaps, the biggest benefit of two-way radio communication was the improvement in police professionalism, as for the first time police supervisors were able to remain in continuous contact with officers.

While technological advances undoubtedly improved policing, these developments did cause some conflicts between the general public and the sheriff's office. Once law enforcement agencies converted to automobile patrols, officers had less contact with citizens in non-adversary situations. This negative side effect of limiting the range of communication between officers and civilians probably had less effect on the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, however, because sheriff's deputies generally had less contact with the general public than did city police officers, due to the geographic character of their jurisdiction. The automobile did, however, cause attitudes about the sheriff's office to change. One of the unanticipated consequences of the automobile patrol was elimination of the distinction between "law breakers" and "law abiders."

Prior to the widespread use of automobiles, the distinction between the "law abiders" and the "law breakers" was fairly clear. This distinction became less clear after the spread of automobiles, because almost everyone who drove violated some law or ordinance at some time. This resulted in officers arresting average citizens or even prominent citizens who formerly would have considered law enforcement officers to be protectors of peace and justice, not agents of undesired confrontation. Thus, automobiles created much tension between police and middle- and upper-class citizens, who had traditionally supported aggressive law enforcement. Bruce Smith, a student of police administration, believes that the hostility engendered by traffic patrols was one reason why police forces in the United States lacked a favorable political climate in which to grow and develop into truly professional organizations.³¹

There is some evidence of this phenomenon in Winnebago County. In a 1969 newspaper article in *The Paper*, Chief Deputy Berwin Jordan discussed why people had unfavorable attitudes about police. He claimed that these attitudes began to develop in the mid-1950s when the traffic patrol was beginning to develop. Increasing numbers of cars and outdated traffic laws had produced more contacts between drivers and police.

³⁰ "County Motor Police Patrol 896 Miles of Area's Roads," 40.

Every contact between a driver and a police officer was perceived to be a form of punishment.³² To counteract this perception, the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, like most law enforcement agencies, has developed programs designed to develop a positive rapport with the community. In the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, a community services unit consisting of three full-time deputies works directly with local organizations, businesses, and citizens to address concerns.

The new technologies of the automobile and the radio dramatically increased the effectiveness of the sheriff's department by lowering response time; but technology alone could not make up for the fact that the patrol division was understaffed. While the population of the county increased along with the number of automobiles, the size of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office patrol division remained virtually unchanged. By May 1953, the sheriff's office only had eight patrol officers for the entire county.³³ This was an extremely low number compared to the sheriff's staff in other counties with equal or smaller populations. The Outagamie County Sheriff's Office had fourteen officers, while the Fond du Lac County Sheriff's Office had ten. Winnebago County was the fifth largest county in the State of Wisconsin by area, with 896 miles of roads and highways in 1953. Under the department's structure in 1953, three patrol officers each worked on day and night shifts four days a week, with an increased number patrolling on Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. This resulted in officers working at least 48 hours per week with no overtime compensation.

Because of the inadequate number of patrol officers, Winnebago County highways were not patrolled on a 24-hour basis. On May 26, 1953, the Winnebago County Board of Supervisors voted 44-0 to add four county officers to the patrol division. This move was made in part because of concern by the County Board that the State of Wisconsin might move to hire its own patrol officers for the county. Supervisors did not favor the idea of the state getting involved in hiring county patrol officers. Oliver Jacobsen, a supervisor from the Town of Menasha stated, "The time is coming where, if we don't put our own men on, the state will." Ben Zimmerman, a supervisor from the Town of

³¹ Richardson, 110-111.

³² "Jordan shows police are human" *The Paper*, May 15, 1969, 6.

³³ "Board Hikes Size of Highway Patrol," *Oshkosh Northwestern* May 27, 1953, 2.

Winneconne, expressed great opposition to allowing the state to enter into county business and urged the board to pass the resolution to hire more officers, which the board did.³⁴

The 1953 vote set a new precedent in County Board policy, for the sheriff's office continued to receive staff increases. By 1955, the sheriff's office was a twenty-two-member organization, including an undersheriff, a day-parole officer-investigator, a director of traffic, a desk sergeant, twelve patrol officers, four radio operators, a jailer, and a jail matron.³⁵ According to the 1950 census, Winnebago County had a rural population of more than 23,000 and a total population of 91,103, including the county's four cities, Oshkosh, Neenah, Menasha and Omro. The sheriff has remained heavily involved with the day-to-day operations of the office, but he was increasingly becoming active in building political relationships and coalitions. For example, the sheriff tried to gain the cooperation of the county's cities by building relationships with the chiefs of police, and the sheriff was also politically active at County Board of Supervisors meetings. In 1955, Sheriff Victor Jordan made statewide news when he recommended that the Board of Supervisors dismiss the chief of the county's motor patrol. The chief was dismissed and replaced by a Director of Traffic for the sheriff's department. The move ended a conflict of authority within the sheriff's office and set a clear chain of command.

Early in 1963, the sheriff's office underwent major organizational changes that triggered changes in the role of the sheriff.³⁶ The organizational changes began with the abolishment of the undersheriff position and the creation of the Chief Deputy position. The new Chief Deputy's duties were primarily intended to relieve the sheriff of many details in connection with the responsibilities of the office and to provide an incoming sheriff with a working organization. The reorganization also included an expansion

³⁴ "Broad Hikes Size of Highway Patrol," 2.

³⁵ Art Techlow, "Winnebago County has Streamlined Dept.," *Wisconsin Sheriff and Deputy Magazine*, September-October (1955), 12. A jail matron is a women manager of the domestic arrangements of a jail or prison. Typically, the jail matron was only a part-time employee used when there were female prisoners at the jail. The term matron is no longer used at the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, as female jailers are now called Correctional Officers.

³⁶ "Organizational Changes Made In Winnebago County Sheriff Department," *Appleton Post Crescent*, January 5, 1963, 5A-6, B2-1.

program that added three new patrol officers. These positions had been sought by former Sheriff Richard “Bud” Lowell (1961-1965), not the first time that the sheriff had lobbied the County Board of Supervisors.

Other changes altered the sheriff’s own position. The reorganization of 1963 abolished the fees that had been paid to the sheriff, including fees for serving legal papers, which had been two dollars for the first service and one dollar for each additional service. In the past, this money had gone to the sheriff or his deputies, but now it was to be placed in the county treasury. However, Winnebago County continued to provide housing for the sheriff, and his salary was adjusted from \$6,400, plus fees, to \$8,000. Furthermore, the sheriff no longer paid the salary of the undersheriff because that position had been abolished. The sheriff still paid the salary of two full-time and one part-time jailers, the matrons for the county jail, and the cook for the county jail.³⁷

The reorganization had not dissolved the sheriff’s financial stake in the operation of the county jail. The sheriff sold certain goods and foods to the prisoners through what is known as a canteen system. Presently, the county receives money generated through the canteen system, but in 1963 it was common and lawful for the sheriff to use the canteen system for his own monetary gain. It also was revealed that the sheriff received 60 cents per meal per prisoner and 80 cents per meal for prisoners under the Huber Law.³⁸ It was still common practice for the sheriff’s wife to cook the meals and keep the remaining money, again a lawful activity. Unchanged throughout the reorganization of the department, and indeed throughout the history of the sheriff’s office, has been the sheriff’s responsibility for the operation of the jail and care of prisoners.

With reorganization complete, the sheriff’s office now included a chief deputy, twenty-one patrol officers including a captain and three sergeants, one lieutenant who handled court arrangements and Huber Act arrangements, one lieutenant who served as head investigator, a chief radio technician, four radio dispatchers, and a clerk-stenographer.³⁹

³⁷ “Organizational Changes Made In Winnebago Sheriff Department.”, 5A-6, B2-1. See also Jay Berger, “Chief Deputy Reviews 30 years of Law Work,” *The Paper*, January 31, 1968.

³⁸ “Organizational Changes Made In Winnebago County Sheriff Department,” 5A-6, B2-1.

³⁹ *Ibid.*

Without question, the sheriff's role underwent a complete evolution from the previous role in day-to-day operations to the administrator and executive of a complex operation. The evolution of the sheriff's office and the sheriff's role within the institution had its roots in the changes in society and the development of police technology, but change was also accelerated by the construction of new jails and courthouses to accommodate the sheriff's ever-increasing staff. Under consideration since 1926, the fourth, current, courthouse was completed in the summer of 1938.⁴⁰ Disagreements on important issues such as location and finance delayed construction of the building for twelve years. Once these were resolved, the courthouse was built using local funds and savings, without outside aid from Federal United States or Wisconsin sources. Total cost for the building was over one million dollars. *A Commemorative Booklet of the New Winnebago County Courthouse* suggested that the new courthouse was perhaps "the most imposing structure in the state." That statement was more an indication of the pride the citizens of Winnebago County took in their new courthouse than an assertion of fact, but considering the amount of change that has occurred in Winnebago County since the building was completed nearly seventy years ago, that fact that it is still in use, alone, is a testament to the building's quality.

Moving into a new jail and sheriff's office headquarters helped change the role of the sheriff. With new responsibilities for the motor patrol and communication center, the sheriff had increasingly diversified duties. When the new jail and headquarters were built, the sheriff's office was still relatively small, with one captain and five other patrol deputies. Also under the direction of the sheriff were four radio deputies who communicated with the patrol deputies. The motor patrol was still in its infancy; however, by 1968, Sheriff Marvin Peppler stated that he could use every room on the first floor and still be short of space in his squad room, which was then used by thirty-two patrolmen.⁴¹

Building a new jail was extremely important to the sheriff, because the conditions at the third jail were deteriorating. There was even serious talk that the state might

⁴⁰ *A Commemorative Booklet*, 2.

⁴¹ Dinah Walter, "New Department Quarters," *Appleton Post Crescent*, July 6, 1968.

condemn the third jail because it lacked basic sanitation and was not secure to hold prisoners. A prominent county official, speaking of the conditions in the third courthouse and jail, stated: “The dungeons and dark holes in the old jail where men and women were confined for violating the laws were damp and unsanitary and, as I remember it, unfit for a pig pen.”⁴²

The new jail, however, was a state-of-the-art facility. One local attorney remarked that: “The new jail is like stepping from the ridiculous to the sublime; to leave the old jail and enter this elegant jail.” Designed for perfect sanitation and for common humane comfort, the jail featured washed, purified air circulated throughout the facility, including cell blocks, and the temperature was controlled at 72 degrees. A huge sterilizing oven cleaned bedding, mattresses and clothing of the prisoners. New features in the jail included juvenile accommodations and a juvenile courtroom, shower baths, special accommodations for the sick, conference rooms, and a complete kitchen. Most features of the jail were mandated by new state standards approved under the latest code for jail construction. The jail had a capacity of 89 prisoners, and this was expected to meet county needs for many years to come.⁴³

The sheriff’s headquarters and jail remained in the new courthouse 43 years. In 1980, by mutual agreement with the County Court system, the sheriff’s office and jail moved out. The court system had continued to expand, and the sheriff’s office, which started out with a few offices, had grown to use the entire ground floor.⁴⁴ During the 1960s the sheriff’s office was growing at a fast pace, with the organization beginning to specialize its functions. In 1968 the detective bureau within the office was beginning to develop into its modern form. Previously, individual officers performed their own investigations, which often led to investigations not being done very thoroughly. The development of a detective bureau had obvious benefits for the community, but it

⁴² *A Commemorative Booklet*, 14.

⁴³ “A good place to avoid-The New County Jail,” *Oshkosh Northwestern*, June 15, 1938, 13. Also see: *A Commemorative Booklet*, 14.

⁴⁴ Michael J. Hill, “County court system shows changes in ’70s,” *Oshkosh Northwestern*, November 9, 1979, 12. Also see “More courtroom remodeling planned,” *Oshkosh Northwestern*, February 19, 1984, 6.

accentuated the lack of space in the growing sheriff's office. In 1969 the detective's room had space for only four desks, although there were six detectives.⁴⁵

By the late 1960s and early 1970s, the once state-of-the-art jail was beginning to deteriorate, and the jail population seemed to increase every year, eventually causing considerable problems in the jail. These problems were complicated by the fact that the sheriff's office lacked appropriate staff to manage the jail. The jail was staffed by one male jailer who had no specialized training. The only training a new jailer received was to shadow a veteran jailer for a week or two. A jail matron also worked in the jail if there were female prisoners. By the late 1970s, it was clear that the jail and sheriff's headquarters were both scheduled to be relocated in the near future, so only minimal funds were spent for repairs and upkeep.⁴⁶ These circumstances probably contributed to the unsettling events that took place at the jail during 1978.

On May 8, 1978, the county jail was flooded by its inmates.⁴⁷ According to a jailer's report, it also appears as though several attempts were made to start fires using paperback books. On October 1, 1978, jailer Ky Rasmussen was choked, knocked down, and had his head banged several times against the floor in an incident police called a planned jail escape.⁴⁸ On October 16, 1978, a fire at the county jail sent one inmate and jailer Ky Rasmussen to the hospital.⁴⁹

Without question 1978 was filled with many disruptions at the jail, but the worst was yet to come. On December 24, 1978, inmates at the Winnebago County Jail gained control of the facility and took jailer Ky Rasmussen and matron Barbara Klaiher hostage. The take-over began at 6:10 p.m., shortly after dinner had been served. Rasmussen had opened a cabinet to get some cigarettes for an inmate when he was jumped from behind;

⁴⁵ Dinah Walter, "New Department Quarters," *Appleton Post Crescent*, July 6, 1968.

⁴⁶ Doug Zellmer, "Committee inspects county jail," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 3, 1979, 4.

⁴⁷ "County jail is flooded," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 9, 1978, 3.

⁴⁸ "Jailer is attacked," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, October 6, 1978, 2.

⁴⁹ "Two treated at Mercy following county jail fire," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, October 16, 1978, 4. Ky Rasmussen's cousin Ron Rasmussen was running for Sheriff at the time. One of his main reasons Ron Rasmussen was running for Sheriff was the contention that Sheriff Marvin Pepler had lost control of the jail. Ron Rasmussen lost the election to Sheriff Marvin Pepler and was never elected Sheriff of Winnebago County. Ky Rasmussen, aged 22 at the time, had only been a jailer for five months when this incident occurred. Perhaps after this unfortunate series of events Rasmussen might have called it a career, but Rasmussen still worked at the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office in 2001, in the Court Services Division.

at the same time, a couple of inmates grabbed Klaiher. The inmates involved in the take-over armed themselves with butcher knives and meat cleavers from the kitchen and with clubs and mace from the jailer's office.⁵⁰

Ironically, the inmates also were able to obtain the keys necessary for them to escape without anyone knowing, because the jail was only staffed by two jailers, and there were no security cameras. The inmates made an attempt to escape by opening the final security door that led to the elevator; but once they pushed the down arrow, the elevator jammed, as it was in use by the cleaning staff on another floor. The inmates panicked, because they thought the jailers had somehow notified the sheriff's office about what had happened. Hence, the inmates themselves called the sheriff's office dispatch center, located on the first floor of the courthouse, and informed them that they had taken over the jail. Dispatch officials immediately called Sheriff Marvin Pepler and informed him about the situation. Sheriff Pepler began gathering a group of officers from the sheriff's office, Oshkosh Police Department, and Wisconsin State Patrol.⁵¹

Detective James Goggins was one of the first to respond to the jail, and he initiated telephone conversations with the inmates. The inmates wanted to bring news reporters to the jail, but reporters balked at the plan when neither police nor prisoners would guarantee their safety. At 8:55 p.m. Detective Goggins took the elevator up to the jail and returned with a list of sixteen demands.

1. Girlfriends allowed to come up to visit on regular visiting hours.
2. On Christmas and birthdays one present allowed per inmate to be brought up here. Also on birthdays one regular 1/2 hour visitation right.
3. One day a week, inmates and head Jailer, and one city councilman of agreement will meet to discuss jail conditions.
4. Visiting every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday.
5. We should have more Workers up here in the Jail.
6. A person should be allowed to call a bonds men with or without the Head Jailer and should be allowed to call anyone to get money up to get out at any time.
7. When people come from out of town they should be let in to Visit.

⁵⁰ Gary Metro and Doug Zellmer, "Charges studied in jail takeover," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 26, 1978, 1,2,5. Peter Bach, "11 Charged in takeover of county jail," *Appleton Post Crescent*, December 26, 1978, 1.

⁵¹ Interview with James Goggins, December 14, 2000. This account of the bungled escape from the jail was not released to the media following the accident.

8. Since we haven't hurt anyone we would like to know that no one is going to get extra time for this jail take over because this is the only way we can voice our opinion.
9. Anyone in this take over should be allowed to be transferred to a different jail, if they run in to any reprocutions.
10. People in the Bul Pens should be allowed their one personal radio per Bull Pen.
11. Bring 3 ink pens back in the morning and they will be turned in at lock-up every night.
12. Better selections of items sold at canteen (Sunday Coffee) Also a price list be posted in cell blocks.
13. A brief run down of jail rules be posted in cell blocks. Grape-vine rules are not the best.
14. Inmates be allowed to have hair brushes. Try setting up something with the Public library whereby more "Hard cover" books would be made available to jail inmates. Hardcover books because they are taken care of better than magazines or paper backs.
15. Nail clippers be made available for inmate use. Inmate asking for clippers would be responsible for same.
16. Better selection of magazines be allowed in jail - Easy Rider, Weed, High Times.⁵²

Sheriff Pepler and Chief Deputy Misch made several attempts to work out a settlement with the inmates, but it appeared that the inmates had no intentions of ending the take-over, and at 10 p.m. Sheriff Pepler decided to proceed with a plan to storm the jail. Officers from the sheriff's office, Oshkosh Police Department and Wisconsin State Patrol entered the jail from the elevator and two stairways, swinging clubs, pointing shotguns and throwing people onto the floor.⁵³

By 10:30 p.m. the incident was over, and both jailers were freed, unharmed; two inmates, however, were hospitalized. On December 27, 1978, the nine inmates involved with the take-over were arraigned on two counts of false imprisonment and one charge of attempted escape.⁵⁴ Details of rapes, an attempted suicide, and attempted arson were also released in connection with the four-hour take-over. One inmate, John West, was sentenced to prison for the rape of two female inmates.

⁵² Gary Metro and Doug Zellmer, "Charges Studied in jail takeover," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 26, 1978, 2. This list retains the inmates' original spelling and grammar.

⁵³ Gary Metro and Doug Zellmer, 2.

⁵⁴ Doug Zellmer, "Nine are arraigned after jail takeover," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 27, 1978, 5.

Analysis of the inmates' sixteen demands reveals themes that contradict official statements concerning the causes of the riot. Contemporary newspaper articles primarily focused on the unsatisfactory conditions in the forty-year-old jail, while officials at the sheriff's office pointed to deteriorating physical conditions and inadequate numbers of staff. Both the *Oshkosh Northwestern* and sheriff's office officials were probably correct in their analysis. The jail was in poor condition, with State officials constantly monitoring overall conditions, and two jailers was an inadequate number, given the number of inmates present.

Yet close examination of inmate demands indicates issues that were not related to poor conditions, but rather to a lack of appropriate staff professionalism and training. It must be pointed out that these demands were hastily composed by only a handful of the inmates involved. Perhaps, the most enlightening statement appears in the latter portion of the eighth demand, which stated, ". . . this is the only way we can voice our opinion." That statement seems to indicate that the Winnebago County Jail lacked appropriate policies and procedures to deal with inmate concerns and complaints. For example, today's inmates at the Winnebago County Jail may fill out a grievance report that is reviewed by the appropriate supervisor. After reviewing the grievance, the supervisor either visits with the inmate or provides a written response.

Many of the demands seemed to focus on policies and procedures within the jail. For example, demand thirteen asks for a list of jail rules to be posted in cell blocks. This suggests that inmates felt there were no set rules governing the jail. Today, as soon as inmates are processed into the jail, they receive a jail rule booklet that includes rules, policies, and procedures. Another theme in the demands is the repeated request for increased visiting privileges. It is possible, with only two jailers working on any given day, that visitors were frequently turned away, because jail staff members were too busy to supervise visits.

Most of the demands contained in the list could certainly have been met without recourse to a riot or take-over, but if there were no procedures regarding inmate complaints, they probably had received no response. Inmates might thus have been led to

believe that the only way to be heard was to create disturbances within the jail, which of course they repeatedly did in 1978.

The jail take-over did result in some minor procedural changes, but increased staffing was the most notable direct consequence of the jail take-over.⁵⁵ The majority of the physical changes needed were addressed with the building of the new county jail, which provided technology that improved the overall operation of the jail. Institutional changes within the sheriff's office following the jail take-over, mainly the further introduction of specialization and professional police training, also altered the way in which the sheriff's office operated during emergency situations such as a jail take-over. If the sheriff's office were again confronted with a jail take-over, personnel would handle it in a completely different way from the approach utilized in 1978. Police training and specialization were only starting to appear in the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office when the jail take-over occurred. For example, Deputy Gary Boyce and Deputy Bryan Bartelt used their newly-trained dogs "Smokey" and "Jet" during the assault to retake the jail.⁵⁶ Both deputies had just returned from a 14-week training school at the Cascade County Sheriff's K-9 Academy near Great Falls, Montana. In general, the sheriff's office had few specialized units at the time, and only in the years that followed the jail take-over would the sheriff's office evolve into a modern, specialized department.

One of the most important areas of specialization which developed after the jail take-over was the formation of elite units. The SWAT team, or Special Weapons and Tactics teams was formed in June 1979.⁵⁷ At its inception, the SWAT team consisted of five deputies from the sheriff's office. These five individuals underwent specialized training conducted by the FBI. The idea behind the SWAT team was to have a small unit of sheriff's deputies who were specially trained in the use of various firearms and techniques for assaults on buildings or other contained areas where a barricaded suspect was located. Members of the SWAT team were also trained in negotiation techniques to handle hostage situations. Another specialized unit that became important

⁵⁵ James Goggins interview, December 14, 2000.

⁵⁶ Michael J. Hill, "First four-legged 'cops' in county now on duty," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 16, 1978, 5.

⁵⁷ "SWAT team is formed in sheriff's department," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, March 1-2, 1980, 3.

for handling special situations was the tactical team. With its roots as far back as 1968, the tactical team developed into a specialized unit that handles large crowds, riots, and strikes.⁵⁸

Without question, these specialized units would have been involved in ending the jail take-over. The SWAT team would have been in control of the entire operation, with trained negotiators talking to the inmates. Members of the SWAT team and tactical team would have made plans to retake the jail, while regular officers would have secured the scene inside and outside the courthouse. As a result of such specialization and professionalization, the sheriff's role changed again, for in such a situation the sheriff would no longer be the only individual involved in the decision-making process. While the sheriff ultimately made the final decisions; with the formation of specialized units, he relied increasingly on trained subordinates within the specialized units. Had the specialized forces been in existence in 1978, the sheriff probably would not have been developing plans to retake the jail. Instead, he would have left that duty to the trained supervisor of the SWAT team.

Along with establishment of specialized elite units within the sheriff's office, training for regular officers dramatically increased during the late 1970s and early 1980s.⁵⁹ When Chief Ed Misch retired from the sheriff's office in 1983 after thirty years, he stated that the area that had made the biggest strides through the years was training.⁶⁰ When Misch joined the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office in 1953, he had simply been given his badge and gun. His only training consisted of reading a book on procedures and two weeks of job-shadowing with a veteran officer. Misch's experience was typical of officer training during the mid-twentieth century. For most rookie officers, their school was the street. Veteran officers went to great lengths to teach traditional values and practices to new recruits.

By mid-twentieth century, larger cities had begun to develop elaborate police training schools; however, for the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office, it was the

⁵⁸ Michael J. Hill, "Sheriff's department has come a long way during past decade," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 3, 1979, 7.

⁵⁹ James Goggins interview, December 14, 2000.

⁶⁰ "Sheriff's department has grown," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, February 20-21, 1982, 13.

establishment of a recruit school in the Fox Valley that changed the training of regular officers.⁶¹ During the 1970s, officers seldom received any formal training. The jail and patrol division did not require attendance at recruit school before starting a job. Once the recruit school was established, new patrol officers were able to receive some training before joining the department, but it was still not uncommon for new officers to spend two years working before attending the recruit school. Inservice training was also established under the direction of a full-time training officer. In 1983, the jail was developing an 80-hour certification program for jailers.⁶² Currently, the State of Wisconsin requires new jail officers to attend a one hundred-twenty-hour recruit school, while patrol officers must attend a four-hundred-hour course before they become certified law enforcement officers.

The advent of specialization and regular police training occurred at a time of great change and expansion within the sheriff's office. On June 11, 1980, the new county/city safety building at the corner of Jackson Avenue and Church Street, where the jail and sheriff's office are currently located, was ready to house the prisoners previously incarcerated at the courthouse, and it was also ready to receive the sheriff's headquarters.

The new jail could confine 92 inmates. The control module was the focal point of the new jail, including twenty-four cameras, strategically located throughout the jail, which could be viewed from five monitors in the control module. All security doors could be monitored. A printout was produced each time a door was opened and closed. The jail had eleven security doors along with four sally-port doors controlled through a computer by an officer manning the module. The identity of any person entering had to be established before the security doors were opened. The final feature of the new jail was a tunnel connecting the county courthouse with the new jail. This tunnel was used for easy and secure transportation of inmates to court hearings. The new jail was a secure and humane detention facility that provided separate confinement areas in the jail for maximum-security inmates and for female and Huber Law inmates. By the end of the century, in 2000, planning for further expansion was under way, for the Winnebago

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Hill, 7.

County Board of Supervisors approved a new sheriff's headquarters and jail, to be built at a cost of thirty-three million dollars. The new law enforcement complex promised once again to meet the space requirement of both the sheriff's headquarters and the jail.⁶³

A standard theme in the growth of the sheriff's office over the last century has been the increasing emphasis placed on professionalism. Already by the early twentieth century, reformers were calling on law enforcement agencies to professionalize their organizations by increasing educational standards and training. The 1920s and 1930s saw a noticeable rise in organized crime and crime rates.⁶⁴ Reformers believed that professionalizing law enforcement agencies was one answer to the crime problem, and they saw technology as a tool to improve administration and training, which would in turn lead to better police efficiency and crime control.⁶⁵

Typically, newly created city, state, and federal agencies were better trained than county sheriff's offices. Therefore, sheriffs often had a reputation as poorly trained and lacking professional qualifications. During the early years of the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office many inexperienced and untrained people served as sheriff. Charles Hamlin (1860-1862) owned a tavern and ran the Winneconne Hotel. Fred Burgess (1884-1886) helped quarry the stone from which the second courthouse was constructed, and Joseph Kloeckner (1890-1892) was a bartender and insurance agent.⁶⁶ There were exceptions: Peter Kraby (1893-1894) served as Chief of Police in Neenah, and David Williams (1914-1916) served two years on the Oshkosh Police Department before becoming sheriff, but in general the early sheriffs were inexperienced in law enforcement practices and procedures.⁶⁷ In the extreme cases, some sheriffs were even criminals or questionable political hacks.

The issue of professionalism led to upheaval in the department in 1928, when Sheriff Walter Plummer (1926-1928) was removed from office. The incident started in November 1927 when the County Board of Supervisors considered closing a county workhouse and sending its prisoners to the county jail, which was under the control of

⁶³ Karl Ebert, "Board hears jail cost," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, December 13, 2000, 1, 4.

⁶⁴ Richardson, 135.

⁶⁵ Miller, 32.

⁶⁶ "County Law Officers Article."

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

Sheriff Plummer. During the deliberations, District Attorney Keefe recommended that the county not abandon the workhouse, and the very next day the District Attorney disclosed some startling information about Sheriff Plummer. After a secret John Doe investigation, District Attorney Keefe filed serious charges with Governor Zimmerman. The governor appointed Hebert Piper as a special commissioner to come to investigate.⁶⁸

The alleged acts of misconduct were, and still would be considered very serious by today's standards. They included allegations that the sheriff sponsored beer parties in the jail during prohibition, released one of his prisoners, a certain Miss Connors, to go out on dates with one Luther Davis while she was in jail, accepted bribes and frequently visited a Menasha "disorderly house," accompanied by a 14-year-old boy, and had sexual relations and intercourse with a female inmate of the jail. Sheriff Plummer strongly denied all the charges, except for the charge that he visited a disorderly Menasha house. Sheriff Plummer shifted the responsibility for such acts, if they had occurred, to his jailer and cook, whom he often left in charge of the jail.⁶⁹

On March 31, 1928, Governor Zimmerman formally removed Walter Plummer as sheriff. In his formal findings of fact, the governor indicated that the evidence taken before commissioner Herbert Piper convinced him that Sheriff Plummer was guilty of "inefficiency, neglect of duties, official misconduct and malfeasance in office."⁷⁰ The governor replaced Plummer with Arthur Hebblewhite, a retired grocer who supported Prohibition. During his time as sheriff, Hebblewhite conducted numerous raids on establishments with dubious reputations. He strictly enforced state law regarding operating an automobile while intoxicated. Perhaps Hebblewhite is best remembered for his campaign against drunken roadside automobile parties, which he attacked by providing more frequent automobile patrols.⁷¹

The Plummer affair provides a classic example of how some unprofessional and corrupt sheriffs operated during the early part of the twentieth century. Certainly the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office has become more professional since Walter

⁶⁸ "Misconduct As Charged Is Held To Be Verified," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, March 30, 1928, 1.

⁶⁹ "Misconduct As Charged Is Held To Be Verified," 1. This information was cross referenced with an anonymous article "Law Officers" located in the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office Historical Collection.

⁷⁰ "Plummer Out-Hebblewhite In," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, March 31, 1928, 1.

⁷¹ "County Sheriff Passes Away At Local Hospital," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, November 21, 1928, 14.

Plummer's time. But this professionalization did not occur overnight. Development of a trained and specialized staff contributed to the professionalism of the office of sheriff. Reflecting this trend were the changes in the career paths followed by elected sheriffs. Arthur Hebblewhite was the last person to serve as sheriff who had not previously worked in the sheriff's office. Ironically, Walter Plummer was the first sheriff who had worked in the sheriff's office prior to being elected sheriff. As the sheriff's office developed a highly trained staff, there were more qualified individuals who might run for the position. Today, most sheriffs are dedicated law enforcement veterans who are college graduates and who possess specialized training.⁷² They generally have worked their way up the departmental ladder from jail division to patrol division to administration. Perhaps Walter Plummer was elected sheriff due to a scarcity of trained officers within the sheriff's office who could compete for the job, combined with the premium that the public placed on seniority in office.

Policy changes instituted by the County Board of Supervisors also made the sheriff's office more professional. The 1963 reorganization created a new position, the Chief Deputy. The intent of this change was to abolish the position of undersheriff, a paid employee of the sheriff rather than the county, and to relieve the sheriff of some of the routine tasks of the office. Gradually, sheriffs lost many of the "fringe benefits" of office such as the right to retain fees, some of which had helped fuel perceptions that the office was inherently corrupt.⁷³ For example, the sheriff lost his house, which was connected to the jail operation, as well as his remuneration for feeding the inmates at the county jail.⁷⁴ A recent development in the sheriff's position is a State Constitutional Amendment, Enrolled Joint Resolution 18 (Senate Joint Resolution 43), which extended the term of office for the sheriff from the traditional two years to four years, beginning with sheriffs elected at the first gubernatorial election following ratification, which took place on November 3, 1998.⁷⁵ This change occurred mainly because of the perception that the sheriff acted as the Chief Law Enforcement Officer in the county for one year and

⁷² John L. Sullivan, *Introduction to Police Science* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1966), 144.

⁷³ "Organizational Changes Made In Winnebago Sheriff Department," *Appleton Post Crescent*, January 5, 1963, 5A-6.

⁷⁴ Judy Serwe, "Bill bans meal profit from sheriff's salary," *Oshkosh Northwestern*, May 26, 1987, 9.

⁷⁵ *Wisconsin Blue Book*. Legislative Reference Bureau (1999), 266.

spent the next year campaigning. Within a four-year term, the sheriff could concentrate more on duties and less on campaigning.

Through the twentieth century, changes in American society, population growth in Winnebago County, and the emergence of new technology adapted for law enforcement all combined to stimulate the growth of specialization and professionalism within the Winnebago County Sheriff's Office and for the position of sheriff itself. The Department was shaped as a complex administrative tool to respond to new challenges in law enforcement. In the process, the office of sheriff was transformed to focus on administration of an organization with a wide range of complex tasks. Training, familiarity with law enforcement techniques, and modern administrative practices replaced the rough and ready procedures of the early twentieth century, while the physical facilities of the sheriff's department also evolved in response to the changing and expanding needs of county law enforcement.

Successful Fond du Lac Sturgeon Fishermen (ca. 1950s)

Fish and Man in Lake Winnebago: Saving the Lake Sturgeon

Jesse Jensen

Cruising through the murky water of the Lake Winnebago system there is a fish of immense size and strength. It can grow to over 200 pounds in weight and live for over 100 years. This creature is known as the sturgeon. In Wisconsin, it is hard to find someone who has not heard of this mysterious creature that has inhabited the Earth for over 100 million years. Such fish are famously and avidly sought by those who are knowledgeable about them. Twenty-five species of sturgeon exist today, worldwide. The particular species of sturgeon that thrives in Lake Winnebago is classified as lake sturgeon. Each year, thousands of eager men and women take to the frozen lake with their ice-shanties and spears, creating a virtual sturgeon spearing city for the brief period of the season, all hoping to catch one of these large but passive creatures.

The lake sturgeon has been assigned thirty different scientific names, largely due to the vast variety of color differences that can be seen exhibited by different individuals. In 1817, the Latin name *Acipenser fulvescens* was given to all lake sturgeon that spend their entire lives in fresh water.¹

Twenty-five different species of lake sturgeon are known to exist in the world today. Of these twenty-five, seven are found in North America. Four are anadromous, spawning in fresh water but living their adult lives in the sea. These include the Atlantic sturgeon, the shortnose sturgeon, white sturgeon, and green sturgeon. The remaining three species indigenous to North America spend their entire lives in fresh water. They are the shovelnose, pallid, and lake sturgeon, all of which can be found in Wisconsin waters. Present distribution of lake sturgeon in Wisconsin encompasses three basins, the Mississippi River, Lake Michigan, and Lake Superior. Lake Winnebago, which drains through the Fox River into Green Bay, is classified as located within the Lake Michigan basin.² Some stocking of lake sturgeon into other larger bodies of water, including the

¹ Gordon R. Priegel, *The Lake Sturgeon* (Madison: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 1971), 3.

² *Ibid.*

Mrs. Marvin Amel with a Lake Winnebago Sturgeon
(ca. early 1950s)

Madison chain of lakes in Wisconsin, has taken place.³ The eggs from the lake sturgeon indigenous to Lake Winnebago are used to re-populate watersheds throughout the original range of the fish.

Since the arrival of Native people in the Lake Winnebago area, lake sturgeon have been sought for their meat and their eggs. In Wisconsin the Menominee were spearing sturgeon for several hundred years before the first European settlers arrived. The Menominee, like many other Native American tribes, have a creation story, and that tribe's story involves the sturgeon. In their story, the sturgeon was adopted as a brother and keeper of the wild rice.⁴ Every spring, the Menominee waited until the sturgeon migrated upriver to spawn, typically in April and May, and then speared them. Sturgeon provided the Menominee with much needed food on which they counted for survival.⁵ Their traditional practices were halted when dams were built below the reservation at Shawano in 1892. These lake sturgeon ceremonies were reinstated in 1993, and today, the Menominee Indians work closely with the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR) to research and study lake sturgeon. The Menominee are allowed to spear an allotted number of sturgeon each year to maintain this tradition. The numbers of lake sturgeon that can be speared by the Menominee are determined by the DNR. Each year this decision is made, based on a current sturgeon population estimate made by the DNR that is in turn largely dependent upon the previous season's spearing total.

Soon after the arrival of large numbers of European settlers, lake sturgeon became one of several species of animal that were over-harvested, thanks to introduction of commercial fishing. Commercial fishing for salmon, lake perch, and walleyes devastated many other species of fish as well, because fishermen used huge nets. Early methods for netting fish were crude and indiscriminate. Fish that were not considered to be of value were killed and discarded without being used in any way. The lake sturgeon was one of these fish species that was simply treated as waste. The lake sturgeon was actually considered to be a pest, because the fish could ruin nets, due to their size. Fishermen collected the sturgeon entrapped in their nets, stacked them like cordwood on the shore of

³ 2002 Wisconsin Lake Winnebago spearing regulations and information (pamphlet), 1.

⁴ The Menominee Indian Tribe of Wisconsin: History: Annual Spring Sturgeon Ceremony. <http://www.menominee.nsn.us/History/History/HistoryPages/HistorySturgeonFeastAndCelebrations>. 1.

the water system, and left them to die and rot. Gradually, fish processors realized that money could be made from lake sturgeon. Fish processors discovered a market for sturgeon eggs, prized as caviar, which became and still are prized as a delicacy. They also found that the sturgeon meat was delicious, whether fresh or smoked. The fish also provided leather and oil, and an added bonus from the fish was a high-quality gelatin, called isinglass, which is extracted from the sturgeon's swim bladder. Isinglass is used to make jellies and as a clarifying agent for alcohol.⁶ These new uses for sturgeon products led to an explosion in the Great Lakes sturgeon fishery industry after 1865. During the most concentrated period of fishing, which lasted from 1879 to 1900, the annual commercial catch of lake sturgeon in the Great Lakes averaged over 4 million pounds. In 1885, at the high point of commercial sturgeon fishing, 8.6 million pounds were harvested, of which 5.2 million pounds came from Lake Erie alone.⁷

Since 1903, the State of Wisconsin has been involved in the protection and study of sturgeon in state waters.⁸ Rapid depletion of the species led the state to ban lake sturgeon spearing and fishing in 1915, and commercial fishing was ended in Lake Michigan in 1929. The total ban remained in effect until 1931. Since 1931 there have been restrictions and special seasons placed on the harvesting of sturgeon in order to preserve the population. Early regulations and restrictions, however, were weak and rarely enforced. This situation changed in 1967 with the creation of the Department of Natural Resources. The agency took over all regulations and enforcement of the environment, including fishing and hunting regulations, air pollution and policies regarding the environment.

Fortunately, the lake sturgeon population in Lake Winnebago did not undergo the commercial fishing pressure that existed on the Great Lakes, mainly because of the lake's depth, or lack of it. Lake Winnebago is a shallow, murky lake, geologically on its way to become a freshwater marsh like Horicon to the south. Commercial fisherman generally considered the lake to be unsuitable for commercially viable operations with large drag

⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁶ University of Hawaii Kapiolani Community College. Eviro-news Listserv <http://library.kcc.hawaii.edu/praise/news/eh165.html>.

⁷ Sturgeon for Tomorrow Website.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 2.

nets. This lack of commercial fishing activity kept lake sturgeon relatively safe in this one part of their habitat.

Within the Department of Natural Resources there are many offices that deal with research and regulation of a particular field. In Oshkosh, Mr. Ron Bruch, Senior Fisheries Biologist for the Department of Natural Resources, is in charge of studying lake sturgeon in the Lake Winnebago system. His dedication and knowledge have been critical to the success of recent regulation of the Lake Winnebago system. Bruch pushed for effective regulation of the number of hours in which spearing is allowed on a given day, along with the number of days that are included in the sturgeon season. He has been interviewed dozens of times and often shares his knowledge and ideas with the public and with interest groups. To help control the possibility of over-fishing, Bruch has supported reduced catch limits on all three classifications of sturgeon in Lake Winnebago. These classifications are juvenile (fish under 40”), adult males, and adult females.

Adult females are the most important category. It is almost impossible to tell the sex of a fish while it is in the water, unless one can observe the fish closely enough to determine that it has a swollen stomach, a clear indication that the fish is a female. A female’s stomach becomes swollen about six months before she is ready to spawn. If the lake sturgeon is over 40 inches long, it is also very likely a female, because males rarely reach that length. The definitive way to determine the sex of a fish, however, is to slice off a piece of its skin and submit it to a laboratory for testing.

One characteristic lake sturgeon share with humans is that females live longer than males. A “prehistoric” characteristic of lake sturgeon is the large swim bladder, which has evolved from a functional lung. While the lake sturgeon is not likely to be mistaken for “Jaws”, it does have a heterocercal (shark-like) tailfin. Lake sturgeon also possess a continuous, flexible, cartilage-encased rod called a notochord instead of the bony skeletal spine of other types of fish.⁹ Lake Sturgeon exhibit a wide range of colors. It is believed that the variation in coloration is due to differences in the nutrients in the water from watershed to watershed. Lake sturgeon also are lighter when they are young and gradually become darker with age.

⁹ Priegel, 4.

Lake sturgeon have no teeth; when eating they use their “whiskers” to feel for food. When a lake sturgeon senses something edible, it sucks the morsel up through its mouth. Since lake sturgeon are bottom feeders, sediments from the lake or river bottom make their way into the sturgeon’s mouth. These sediments are then filtered through the sturgeon’s gills, and the unwanted or inedible material is released back into the water. Lake sturgeon feed until the water temperature drops to thirty-four degrees.¹⁰

When spawning time comes, the males are the first to arrive upstream. While the females travel alone to spawn, males travel in small groups of up to eight. Although territorial during the summer, lake sturgeon have been tracked up to 125 miles upstream from Lake Winnebago. Spawning time for lake sturgeon is determined by water temperature, just like other fish.¹¹ The water temperature needs to reach the mid-fifties before the spawning movement begins. When it is time, the female sturgeon deposits her eggs in shallow rocky areas along the bank of a river. These eggs become attached to the rocks and then are fertilized by a male sturgeon. There is a considerable variation in the number of eggs produced by sturgeon, even among fish of the same weight. The quantity can range from 50,000 to 700,000.¹² These eggs are not deposited all at once. Each deposit of the eggs takes seconds, but after each deposit, the female lake sturgeon swims into deep pools in the river and later returns to deposit more eggs. This series of acts usually takes five to eight hours. The fertilized eggs hatch into sac-fry around eight to fourteen days after being deposited. The young lake sturgeon remain hidden in the crevices of rocks and then school up in the deeper water of the river until the end of their first summer, at which time they range in size from five to eight inches. Some lake sturgeon may spend up to five years in the river before finally reaching one of the lakes connected to Lake Winnebago. After hatching, lake sturgeon grows rapidly in length until sexual maturity is reached; but then this trend of rapid growth comes to an end. Both sexes grow at the same rate; female sturgeon are typically larger than males, but this is because of their greater longevity. Sexual maturity for females occurs around the age of twenty-five and at a length of fifty-five inches. Female lake sturgeon only spawn every

¹⁰ Priegel, 5.

¹¹ Priegel, 6.

¹² *Ibid.*

three to five years, while the males provide milt to fertilize eggs either every year or every other year.¹³ The male lake sturgeon reaches its sexual maturity at the age of fifteen when the fish is typically about forty-five inches long.¹⁴ Because of the relatively long time it takes for lake sturgeon to reach sexual maturity, a catastrophic decline, or “crash” in the population would require almost a half-century before the species could replenish itself. Ninety percent of all sturgeon over thirty years old are females. Few fish over the age of 40 are taken from Lake Winnebago, and the oldest one taken for which an age was recorded was 82 years old. In Lake of the Woods, Ontario, the oldest lake sturgeon ever recorded was determined to be 152 years old. It weighed 215 pounds.¹⁵

Efforts have been made to rear sturgeon domestically by collecting eggs and milt from wild sturgeon. The first known attempt at farming lake sturgeon was undertaken in 1875 near the Hudson River in New York. In 1912, this first effort at domestic cultivation of lake sturgeon ceased due to an overall lack of success. More recently, thanks to the improvements in technology and a generally greater understanding of the conditions needed for successful rearing of lake sturgeon, the Department of Natural Resources began to rear sturgeon in Wisconsin in 1982.¹⁶ Research has shown that the lake sturgeon that are reared in captivity tend to be smaller and do not live as long as those that were hatched in the wild. The Wisconsin Department of Agriculture and the DNR have both addressed the issue of allowing fish farmers to raise sturgeon to sell for caviar and meat. These private fish farmers undoubtedly think that this would be a good idea, but some conservation groups and the DNR itself oppose it, despite the fact that sturgeon farming has been successfully undertaken elsewhere.

In Florida, Blountstown researchers at the University of Florida’s Sam Mitchell Aquaculture Farm harvested 1800 farm-raised Gulf of Mexico sturgeon. This project was created to see if this threatened species could be reared successfully in captivity. Researchers believe that the sturgeon meat could bring in four dollars a pound, which

¹³ John Lyons, James J Kempinger, *Movements of Adult Lake Sturgeon in the Lake Winnebago System*, (Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 1992), 1.

¹⁴ Priegel, 8.

¹⁵ Steve AreLulleman, Donald Czeskleba, Thomas Thuemler, *Artificial Spawning and rearing of Lake Sturgeon at the Wild Rose State Fish Hatchery*, (Wisconsin, Madison: Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources, 1983), 8.

¹⁶ *Ibid*, 1.

would provide a new and larger source of revenue than the 75 cents a pound that farm-raised catfish bring to their producers.¹⁷ However, in Wisconsin the idea of farming sturgeon is opposed by the DNR because of uncertainty as to what the consequences might be for the natural stocks.

Although the Department of Natural Resources raises lake sturgeon for research and for stocking, the agency claims that, once sturgeon begin to be raised commercially, many problems could occur. One difficulty might be the introduction of diseases into sensitive fisheries where a consequent high death rate could devastate fish populations in that fishery. Another problem could be the disruption of sturgeon genetics, which could conceivably cause a complete crash in populations. A crash in lake sturgeon numbers could result in wild lake sturgeon breeding with fish reared in captivity. Those that are reared in fish farms may not have the same defenses against diseases that wild lake sturgeon possess. Any one of these problems could devastate the fragile lake sturgeon fishery to the point where it would take 50 to 75 years to restore the number of fish to a healthy level. On the other hand, private rearing of lake sturgeon takes place in Minnesota, and no apparent adverse consequences have occurred as a result of that operation, to date.

Since the 1967 formation of the Department of Natural Resources, through its efforts to protect and to improve the State's resources by enforcement of laws and regulations, the numbers of lake sturgeon have increased in the State of Wisconsin. During this period, other major world sturgeon fisheries, such as in Russia, have seen sturgeon populations plummet due to poaching, over-harvesting, and environmental degradation. "Sturgeon are very good at surviving," according to Ron Bruch. "They can survive drought, climate changes, food shortages. One thing they cannot survive is over-harvest. They're very sensitive to too many of them being taken out of the population."¹⁸

Demand is greatest for female sturgeon, because of the high value that is placed on their eggs as a luxury food. Many world sturgeon habitats have come under enormous stress. Since the damming of the Volga River forty years ago, exacerbated by increasing

¹⁷ "UF Project Shows Sturgeon Can Be Successfully Raised in Fish Farms," *University of Florida News*, November 5, 1999.

¹⁸ "Sturgeon Symposium Under Way," *University of Wisconsin News*, July 8, 2001.

pollution, and poaching, the population of fish in the Caspian Sea, which supplies 90% of the world's best caviar, has plummeted. Poaching has flourished since the Soviet Union dissolved in 1991. The temptations are enormous. In a country where the average wage may only be a few hundred dollars per year, one pound of Beluga caviar, the favored type, in Russia sells for \$50 (U.S), while in Western markets a pound of the same caviar can bring close to \$1,000. In July 2001, Russia, along with other littoral states including Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, signed an agreement implementing a moratorium on sturgeon fishing in the Caspian Sea. Currently, the principal caviar-exporting nation is Iran, which also borders the Caspian.

During the past thirty years, many non-governmental organizations have become involved in efforts to help protect the lake sturgeon population in Wisconsin. One such group is Sturgeon for Tomorrow (SFT). This organization was formed in 1977 by a group of sturgeon enthusiasts. The organization's main goals are to help preserve, protect and to enhance the sturgeon resources of the Lake Winnebago system. This group has become the largest citizen advocacy group for sturgeon in the world. Currently there are four chapters with a total of more than 3,000 members.¹⁹ Sturgeon for Tomorrow has donated over \$450,000 for sturgeon research and management since its formation, and the group has funded a variety of projects, including the sturgeon guard program, which protects the sturgeon during their spawning period, when they are most vulnerable. Members of Sturgeon for Tomorrow have also been involved in construction of spawning sites for sturgeon on the Wolf River. SFT also donates money to the DNR for managed rearing of lake sturgeon. This program has contributed to many sturgeon restoration programs throughout the Midwest and in Canada.

Over-fishing of the Lake Winnebago population still remains a major concern. During the decade from 1989 to 1999, about 6,200 adult female sturgeon were speared, some 2,000 more than the DNR believed was appropriate, if the fishery is to remain healthy. The average sturgeon speared from Lake Winnebago today is about 23 years old, 52 inches long and weighs nearly 40 pounds. This suggests the time commitment necessary to rebuild a sturgeon population to a point where harvesting is feasible.

¹⁹ 2002 Wisconsin Sturgeon Spearing Regulations.

The key to sustaining the population is to support a significant number of breeding female sturgeon. According to Ron Bruch of the DNR, “Our main goal is try to grow a bunch of old ladies, old female sturgeons.” Bruch notes that there is little room for error in the matter, due to the slow process of maturation and low rate of reproduction by the fish. “Once you crash a sturgeon population and you go into the mode of active restoration, you will not have reached your restoration goal until 100 years later.” “If we allow the harvest as it has been for another decade like the one from 1985-1995, in all likelihood we would be faced with closing the season completely.”²⁰

Dick Braasch of Oshkosh, a sturgeon-spearing enthusiast for forty-five years who is active in the conservation group Sturgeon for Tomorrow, said that most of those who spear sturgeon agree with the DNR’s plan to restrict the harvest of sturgeon severely.²¹ Local support like this provides a positive and atmosphere in which to manage the resource, to make sure that the sturgeon fishery in Lake Winnebago and the surrounding watersheds continues to improve. Although listed as an endangered species throughout the world, in Wisconsin there have been both a spearing season on Lake Winnebago and a brief hook and line season (on the Lower Wisconsin River) for sturgeon during the past seventy years. The future of the lake sturgeon looks bright, supported as it is by technology and a strong and increasing public interest in saving the lake sturgeon.

With the population of sturgeon in Russian waters almost completely depleted and the demand for caviar continuing to increase, the importance of studying lake sturgeon in the Lake Winnebago region is only likely to increase, as will the number of people illegally taking the fish. Evidence of the growing worldwide interest in the sturgeon of Lake Winnebago can be seen from a recent international conference. Representatives from many countries came to Oshkosh, Wisconsin in July 2001 to learn about the concentration of lake sturgeon in the Lake Winnebago system and how the fish has been preserved and nurtured in the region. This meeting, the Fourth Annual International Sturgeon Symposium, held July 8-13 at the Park Plaza International Hotel, attracted 375 fisheries biologists and other scientists from 23 countries around the world. The assembled delegates heard from local experts and conservation wardens about how they

²⁰ “State Seeks to Set Caps for Sturgeon Season,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, January 20, 1999.

have protected and how they plan to continue to enhance the sturgeon population. Emphasizing a combination of biological management, law enforcement, and public involvement, local scientists offered suggestions to increase the numbers of fish in countries where sturgeon populations have declined. Contrary to Ron Bruch's earlier estimate, conference attendees were told that the lake sturgeon population has quadrupled in Lake Winnebago during the past forty years.²²

This population supports an annual average combined harvest of over 1300 fish during the winter spear fishery. An estimated 10,000 individuals actively seek to spear lake sturgeon on Lake Winnebago.²³ In recent years, the numbers of people who successfully spear lake sturgeon have increased. In consequence, the season has become greatly shortened, sometimes to a single day, for the DNR ends it as soon as a target number of adult females have been registered. It is believed that the increased rate of success by sturgeon spearmen is largely due to the activities of an invasive species of mollusk known as the zebra mussel. Probably introduced into the lake in the ballast water from a pleasure boat, the zebra mussel filters the lake's water and makes it clearer by consuming algae and other nutrients found in the lake. Prior to the accidental introduction of the zebra mussel, the water in the Lake Winnebago system was much more murky. This lack of water clarity provided the lake sturgeon with extra protection, since it was difficult to see a sturgeon at any depth. Several proposals have been suggested to deal with the consequences of recent increased interest in sturgeon spearing and the improved rate of success, including proposals for years without a season, a permit lottery system, or declaring some sections of the lake out of bounds for sturgeon spearing.²⁴

Currently a sturgeon must be thirty-six inches long in order for it to be legally speared in Lake Winnebago, and every spearer must be at least fourteen years old. Other rules regulate the use of lights and other gear, and agents check shanties to make sure that all regulations are being followed. Before one sets out to try spearing one of these ancient

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² "Sturgeon Symposium Under Way," *University of Wisconsin News*, July 8, 2001.

²³ Fourth Annual Sturgeon Symposium Web site.

²⁴ Ed Culhane, "Record Haul of Sturgeon Stirs Debate," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, February 16, 2004.

fish, it is critical to check the rules and regulations, because they vary year to year as the need to protect the spawning population changes.

In Wisconsin the population of lake sturgeon continues to rise, which is a credit to the men and women involved in protecting these primitive fish. As laws and regulations are proposed or adjusted in Wisconsin to protect lake sturgeon, countries that have declining lake sturgeon population will continue to look to emulate Wisconsin's policies in order to reverse the decline of their own fish stocks. The lake sturgeon has been able to adapt and overcome many challenges. People in the Fox Valley are fortunate to enjoy the largest population of lake sturgeon in the world! As long as Wisconsin can continue to protect and improve the lake sturgeon's habitat and to regulate the harvest, these ancient fish can continue to thrive.

**Democracy Disenfranchised?:
A Policy Analysis of Local Government Elections
in Fond du Lac, Wisconsin**

Angela Hannemann and Todd Whittaker

This paper reports a study of the at-large system of city council representation practiced by the City of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin.¹ It demonstrates that the current system creates the potential for sectors of the city's population to be disenfranchised, even to the extent that such a sector may include a majority of citizens. Qualitative analysis of interview data provided by various members of the community, including local media, public officials and their staff members, former public officials, and historians, indicates mixed opinions about the system's effectiveness, and enumerates both rationale for the existing policy and certain disadvantages. Survey results collected from city council members who served the city between the years of 1993 and 2003 show similar mixed opinion, but demonstrate clear majorities agreeing that a change to a ward system of election would facilitate greater diversity, lower campaign costs, more easily accommodate individual citizen needs, and provide the overall best representation for the community. In conclusion it is proposed that the city adopt a ward system for city council elections modeled upon those of neighboring communities in order to ensure proper representation and consistency with democratic principles.

Research was undertaken in an attempt to understand the nature of the at-large system of election and representation as in the City of Fond du Lac, as well as to evaluate its ability to represent the community. Also considered were comparisons with election processes in neighboring communities as well as at county and state levels. Conclusions and recommendations were drawn after a careful analysis of interview and survey data as well as information gathered from general city records.

¹ The authors wish to express their gratitude to all those who have provided their assistance to enable the completion of this research project, especially to survey respondents for their participation. Special thanks are offered for the cooperation of Martin Ryan, the immediate past city council president, as well as former councilmen Lewis Rosser and David McPhail. Also helpful were Michael Mentzer of the *Fond du Lac Reporter*, Sally Albertz of the Fond du Lac County Historical Society, and Carol VanBeek of the City Manager's Office. Finally, an additional expression of thanks must be given for the direction provided by Dr. Richard Whaley and the guidance of Professor Larry Reynolds of Marian College of Fond du Lac.

Interviews were conducted by one or both of the authors at venues identified by the participants. These consisted of questions intended to elicit information about past and present election and representation policies, participants' opinions for or against the at-large system of election, and the overall demographic makeup of the sample group. Approval from the Marian College Institutional Review Board was obtained prior to the collection of any data. Interviewees were selected in order to include varied perspectives. Representing the media, the editor of the *Fond du Lac Reporter* was chosen, and to achieve a historical perspective, so was a local volunteer for the Historical Society with considerable expertise in Fond du Lac archival holdings. The president of the 2003 city council was interviewed as a public official, and the city manager's secretary as a staff member working for a public official. Two former city council members were also selected to represent past public officials and to share their perspective as citizens with past experience of public office. Data were gathered from local media, city databases, directories, informational material and statutes.

A twenty-six-item survey was administered by mail to city council members who served between the years of 1993 and 2003, with the request that the surveys be returned anonymously in order to provide information for a research project examining local government. In select cases where survey group members were members of the Marian College community, survey materials were delivered by hand, with similar provision for anonymity insured by requesting the surveys be returned by mail. The survey sample was compiled through examination of the records of city council members as listed in the City of Fond du Lac directory. Where better contact information was lacking, mailings were directed to the addresses indicated in this directory. The 1993-2003 ten-year time frame was considered appropriate for an accurate analysis of a recent issue concerning municipal government. Survey respondents were asked basic demographic information, and given the opportunity to agree, express neutrality, or disagree with a number of statements designed to evaluate both the at-large and the ward system of electing representation (Refer to Appendix for survey questions). If phone contact information was known for members of the survey sample, additional contact was attempted in this manner, after about one month, expressing gratitude for cooperation if participation had

already occurred, and encouraging participation in case the survey had not yet been returned. Forty-five per cent of surveys distributed were received completed as of April 2004, when final data were analyzed. Several surveys were returned via U.S. Mail, undelivered due to likely out of date addresses.

Within a democratic system of government, even municipal government policy must be reviewed to assure its dedication to the principle of social justice and of fair and equal representation. Because of their fundamental importance to the democratic system, policies concerning election processes are especially deserving of attention. In the City of Fond du Lac, such careful investigation is warranted concerning the present policy of electing city council representatives at-large. Governed by a council-manager system, council members serve as the main decision-making body for the community. Rather than electing representatives from specific districts, council members campaign and are elected at-large, with no restrictions as to where they must reside. By examining the policy through different forms of analysis, from an overview of the issues through its historical, social, economic and political significance, an accurate portrayal of the policy's effects and an appropriate evaluation of the policy itself can be made. This evaluation can then be compared to the views of former and current councilmen as gathered in the survey in order to determine the attitudes of those who have actually participated in governing Fond du Lac. Finally, conclusions about the election policy and the perceptions of that policy can be utilized to suggest whether it should be continued or modified.

The current at-large system of council representation seems problematic for the community for several reasons. First, it is possible with this system for one geographical region of the city to have a disproportionately high or low number of residents elected to the council. In this manner, a single economic class, ethnic group, or special interest group residing in one part of the city could dominate local politics, giving greater attention to their interests and ignoring the needs of those who are not a part of the elite faction. Permitting public policy to serve the interests of an elite minority is contrary to the concept of pluralism valued within and sought by our basic ideals of democratic government.

This issue was addressed in a survey distributed to current and past council members from 1993 to 2003. Respondents did demonstrate some consistency of economic status, with 62.5% indicating their income to be at least \$50,000. Likewise, they had similar educational backgrounds, with 89% having some education beyond high school, and 67% holding at least an undergraduate college degree. All respondents were male, and 62.5% were over 60 years of age. In regard to political affiliation, 67% were Republican, whereas 33% considered themselves independent, and none reported themselves to be Democrats.² These numbers show an overwhelming lack of political, gender, and age diversity amongst council members who served during the last ten years.

Theoretically, members of the council are to consider the needs of the community as a whole. Advocates of the present system, including the immediate past city council president, Martin Ryan, argue that if elections were held by district, council members would only attend to the wishes of those within their district, and might neglect citywide needs.³ However, one may alternatively assume that citywide improvements, if they truly benefit the majority of the city, would continue to receive support from the majority of representatives. There would likewise continue to be an obligation on the part of each representative to advance the whole of the community, a concept clearly demonstrated at a national level, where congressmen/women are elected by individual states, but are expected to consider the well being of the entire country as well as residents of their districts. If district representatives narrowed their advocacy to the issues of their wards, at least each district would still be represented. If representatives elected at-large narrow their activism in this manner, entire sectors of the city and population may be disenfranchised. Furthermore, the community as a whole could suffer from a lack of diverse input, diminishing interest or frustration about government on the part of groups that are not part of the “dominant faction.”

Not only might under-represented populations have difficulty obtaining redress of grievances or consideration of suggestions, but impoverished citizens and even those from middle-class sectors of the community are likely to face serious difficulty mounting an election campaign that must reach a citywide electorate, due to the substantial financial

² City Government Survey (See Appendix)

burden reaching such a large constituency entails. Presently, Fond du Lac City Council campaigns must extend not only throughout a single ward, but throughout all of them. This election policy can be compared to the district system used for Fond du Lac County Board elections and to the size of campaigns required for Wisconsin State Assembly elections. The amount of funding required to conduct a comprehensive competitive campaign in the at-large system in Fond du Lac may be as much as \$25,000.⁴ The cost of each city campaign may be larger than what is required for county elections and approaches what is required for State Assembly races. According to the survey, 67% of respondents agreed it would be less expensive for a candidate to run in a specific ward system. Furthermore, 56% of survey participants agreed that electing representatives from specific wards would result in greater diversity among public officials.⁵ These results suggest that a switch to a ward system might result in more diversity among public officials, including opening the door to greater involvement for those who do not currently have the financial means to run for public office.

Considering the identified problems of high campaign costs and a lack of council diversity, the absence of universality and regularity in the current policy design becomes apparent. Instead, a tendency toward selectivity and categorical allocation prevails. For example, ability to be elected to serve on the council, as well as ability to have concerns considered as a citizen, seems to be dependent on the following conditions: economic status, geographical location of residence within the city, and both the means and willingness to contact a large number of constituents or representatives.

The council members have the authority to pick and choose concerns to address without responsibility to a certain specific constituency. Such decisions may be further influenced by the will of financial contributors or one's own financial interests.

A historical analysis may aid in understanding how such an apparently problematic policy originated. Formerly, Fond du Lac utilized the commission form of government, in which a mayor and two councilmen, elected at-large, governed the city. In 1957, Fond du Lac was the last city in the state to abandon this system in favor of the

³ Martin Ryan, city council president, interview, October 24, 2003.

⁴ Lewis Rosser, former city council member, interview, September 25, 2003.

⁵ City Government Survey.

current government form, known as the city-manager plan. The city-manager form provided for seven councilmen to be elected at-large, and this policy has remained in effect for nearly five decades. The policy was initiated due to a general sense of public discontent with the former leadership, which seemed largely inactive and inefficient. It was approved by the electorate by referendum on April 2, 1957, and adopted by the council on October 12, 1957.⁶ Currently, of the 190 cities in the state; Fond du Lac is one of only ten that utilize the city-manager plan.⁷

Before leaving office, former councilman Lewis Rosser articulated his opposition to the current policy and stated that he favored a shift to partial or complete districting.⁸ Earlier, the issue was addressed a few times in editorials to the local newspaper, but it has never been brought before the public in referendum form. Mr. Rosser's comments did not result in any public vote or policy change initiative.

However, further exploration of election history elsewhere in the United States points to the problems of Fond du Lac's current policy. In the post-Civil War South, at-large elections were used as a means of disenfranchising newly-freed slaves, and again, during the struggle for civil rights during the post World War II era, to discourage African-American involvement in local politics.⁹ While present-day elections are less heavy-handed, it seems that mistakes have been repeated by perpetuating a policy wherein disenfranchisement of certain sectors of the population may prove likely.

The disenfranchisement that resulted from the at-large system has led to controversy and federal lawsuits across the nation. For instance, a U.S. District Court ruled on March 6, 2003, that Charleston County, South Carolina violated the Federal Voting Rights Act of 1965 in its use of an at-large system of election that deprived African-American voters of their proper political influence.¹⁰ The Wagner School District of South Dakota was sued for similar reasons when it became apparent that the voting power of Native Americans was weakened by the at-large election of school board

⁶ City of Fond du Lac homepage, available online: www.ci.fond-du-lac.wi.us/

⁷ Curt Witynski, assistant director of League of Wisconsin Municipalities, 2002 New Officials Workshop, available online: www.lwm-info.org/newofficials/organization.html.

⁸ Rosser.

⁹ Susan Gluck Mezey, review of *Colorblind Justice: Minority Voting Rights and the Undoing of the Second Reconstruction*, by J. Morgan Kousser, in *Law and Politics*, IX:6 (June 1999), 272-274.

members.¹¹ These cases provide examples of how it has been acknowledged elsewhere that the at-large system of election can disenfranchise certain voters.

Why has this system remained unchallenged in Fond du Lac? Perhaps those currently enjoying disproportionate power are reluctant to relinquish their control. It may be that the policy itself discourages change, inherently creating difficulty. Without substantial funding and political voice, those disenfranchised by the system find it hard to bring about policy change.

Based on interviews with current and former councilmen and other affected persons, it is clear that knowledge of the problem is fairly well understood. But who are the disenfranchised? What portion of the Fond du Lac community, if any, may be under-represented? Analyzing the place of residence of thirty-three past and present councilmen who served during the time period from 1982 to 2003, only five resided west of Main Street (with one of these five residing within one block of Main Street), only six resided north of highway 23, and twenty-four resided south of highway 23 and east of Main Street. This means that over 70 % of past and present council members resided within that one area of the city at the time of their service on the council.¹² In order to interpret the data further, one must take into account the populations of these areas, not just their geographical size. Currently, more than 56% of registered electors in the city of Fond du Lac do not have a city council member who lives in their ward.¹³ The majority of citizens do not live in the same areas of town in which the majority of council representatives reside. Furthermore, it must be noted through general observation that the area with the greatest concentration of elected representatives contains newer, more expensive housing. The areas in Fond du Lac that consist of lower-income housing have fewer elected representatives living among them.

Conflict theorist C. Wright Mills described a situation in which a particular elite group has seized the majority of political power. Mills suggested that this happened as a

¹⁰ Demos Network for Ideas and Action. *Democracy Dispatches*, No. 32. April 16, 2003.

¹¹ Sean Cavanagh. "South Dakota District Sued Over At-Large Election System." *Education Week*, May 1, 2002.

¹² City of Fond du Lac Directories, council-manager government, 1982-2003.

¹³ City of Fond du Lac Voting Ward Map, City of Fond du Lac Election Statistics, spring election, April 1, 2003.

consequence of interaction among three levels of society: the power elite, the governmental planners, and the masses. According to this theory, policy made in this fashion is the result of the will of the elite, the efforts of the middle level, and the disregard or exploitation of the masses.¹⁴ American sociologists David Riesman and Daniel Bell argued that, due to the democratic nature of the source of political power in the United States, Mill's theory should not be applicable. They referred to the interplay of group interests, or various "veto groups" as fundamental to American democratic society.¹⁵ When analyzing the political situation in Fond du Lac in relation to human behavior theory, one must question whether the current setting, because of its similarity to Mill's model, can be conducive to the pluralistic tradition that is revered in American governmental institutions at all levels, including local government.

Other major social values relate to the problem of disproportionate representation in Fond du Lac. One is the value of achievement and success. It is assumed that only the "successful" are elected, due to the financial and political support needed to campaign. Those who have difficulty demonstrating "success," particularly in the form of financial wealth, are "justifiably" excluded from political participation and their concerns easily dismissed because their lifestyle violates the value of achievement and success. Another rationale proposed in support of the existing system is the value of efficiency and practicality. This argument is used in favor of the at-large system because supporters of the policy claim that having councilmen represent the entire city eliminates arguments or internal discord that they claim would result from each representative advocating only a single ward's needs.¹⁶ Another value that might influence change in the policy is that of equality. The national philosophy of Americans is to allow equal political participation and fair opportunity for all. This value seems to be in conflict with the others mentioned above. The importance of pluralistic democracy is a commonly held value, one wherein every person's preferences are considered. Disapproval of the currently existing election policy stems from a devotion to this value and a perception that it is not being upheld in local elections. The political situation in Fond du Lac, therefore, is one characterized by

¹⁴ Susan P. Robbins, Pranab Chatterjee, Edward R. Canda, *Contemporary Human Behavior Theory: A Critical Perspective for Social Work* (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn & Bacon, 1998), 72.

¹⁵ Robbins, 75.

value conflicts, because although the community agrees in principle with the values of equality and democracy, these are mitigated by the conditions set forth in social definitions of success and efficiency.

Values form the basis of goals both stated and unstated. The main manifest goal in this case is to represent the citizens of Fond du Lac in governing the city effectively. Latent goals may be to maintain commonalities within the council that lend themselves to efficient decision-making without much dissent and to uphold the tradition of electing representatives at large. However, it seems that the goals of those on the council may be different from those who are disenfranchised, those who may hold goals to improve opportunities for lower and middle-class workers, those who seek to increase diversity on the council, and those who would change the election policy in order to decrease campaign costs and to provide direct representation for all districts.

The current policy is based on an implicit hypothesis that a city council that is elected at-large will be more efficient, coming to consensus more often and without delay because councilmen will not be focusing on their individual districts, but on the whole of the community, and because citizens may bring their concerns to any member of council, eliminating problems of one district's representative being stronger than another.

This argument of efficiency may be misplaced, for it may be lost as citizens struggle to contact several councilmen hoping to convey their concerns, since none is specifically accountable to them, and also as councilmen receive telephone calls and other correspondence from citizens throughout the city, rather than focus on the residents of their districts. Notably, a majority of survey respondents thought a ward system more effective for individual citizens to address their needs, whereas only 33% thought the at-large system to be more effective.¹⁷

Efficiency is lost for election purposes as well, as candidates must solicit support and votes throughout a larger area. Furthermore, one can make the argument that even if efficiency were improved by the at-large system, debate and compromise, not speedy agreement, better characterize the democratic system.

¹⁶ Michael Mentzer, content editor *The Reporter*, interview, October 24, 2003.

The at-large system's rationale also is supported by the hypothesis that the at-large system produces election of the strongest, most successful citizens, those with financial/social status as their qualifications, and that this is preferable. This seems true to the extent that those elected in Fond du Lac do seem to be members of the upper-middle to higher- socioeconomic classes. But whether that is preferable is questionable. First, is financial/social status the most important qualification for office? Perhaps individuals can be equally or more qualified because of their experience in politics, management expertise, or exceptional communication/organizational skills. Perhaps people do not necessarily have to be wealthy or socially esteemed to possess the skills required to represent the community well. Secondly, is it preferable to have all councilmen come from similar backgrounds, or would a more diverse council better foster democratic government? Perhaps the community would be better served if council members brought to the table a variety of social experiences, ethnicities, and areas of residency. After all, America has emerged as a polyglot society, in which government at all levels must promote cooperation, understanding, and harmony among *all* groups. That is: government must lead by example.

Economic analysis is applicable to a policy such as this one as well. At a macroeconomic level, the policy seems to serve the city well enough. Many council members are business owners or hold well-paying positions in industry, and this may help attract businesses and jobs to the area. On the other hand, unemployment or underemployment are harder for workers to address when they have no specific representative responsible to them, or the ward in which their employer operates. For the city as a whole, the present policy seems to work well. Economic growth in some areas (especially in the area where most councilmen reside) seems to balance out the lack of expansion in other areas. But there does appear to be a growing disparity between the rich and poor, and these financial boundaries align with geographical regions of the city. It is also argued that the present system is cheaper for the city to operate. In terms of opportunity cost, the at-large system and district election would not significantly differ

¹⁷ City Government Survey.

unless additional council positions were created. Even then, as council members are only part time employees, the changes in cost would not be large.

Microeconomic analysis paints a slightly different picture of the electoral system. If a comprehensive competitive election campaign costs \$25,000 in the at-large system, few local residents can reasonably expect to be able to mount a credible campaign. Those who do manage to find the resources to become candidates may have to do so with the aid of special interest groups who might expect special attention once the candidate is elected. Under the current policy, when approaching city council with a concern, a citizen needs to contact all representatives, because any single member may have no particular interest in the issue, and some council members will have less political strength than others. The cumbersomeness of this process tends to discourage citizens from voicing their concerns and opinions, simply due to the amount of effort and expense required, and it tends to convey the feeling constituents have no “voice” to support their concerns. At a microeconomic level, the opportunity cost appears higher for the at-large system than for the district system.

Perhaps the most revealing analysis for this issue is a political analysis. Current council members must be perceived as major stakeholders, because if the policy changed to representation by district, several would be forced to move to a different district or lose political power, since they currently reside within what would become the same district. Members of the public who live in the same part of the city as the current councilmen and presently enjoy abundant representation may also be reluctant to alter the policy. The conclusion is that those in political power and their neighbors are major beneficiaries in the current policy and are unlikely to advocate for or support change.

The current electoral policy does have opponents, including most obviously those citizens who live in under-represented areas of the city and others who oppose the policy because of its apparent lack of consistency with democratic principles, and at least one former councilman who, after serving on the council, concluded that at-large election was unjust.¹⁸

¹⁸ Rosser.

Politically, the present system has been defended by the assertion that it produces efficient city government, since district elected representation would result in time consuming debate over each constituency's causes, as well as by the argument that it would be difficult to find candidates who reside in some areas of the city, leading to vacancies on the council.¹⁹ This argument lacks substance, however, for district representation has been used in many cities and for Fond du Lac County's Board without producing the kinds of problems that are ascribed to district representation by its detractors. The possibility of vacancies due to a lack of interested candidates does not seem to be a problem in areas where elections are held by district. In fact, more citizens may consider running for public office if the policy change were made, because costs would decrease if campaigns only needed to be mounted in a single ward instead of citywide. An understanding of the grounds for support of the present policy also must take into account the Fond du Lac community's affinity for tradition. Some members of the council legitimize the policy because it is the way things have been done for the last forty-six years. Finally, there is the argument that citywide representation eliminates the possibility that one district could have politically weaker representation than another, and therefore be disenfranchised through ineffective representation. This theory is dubious too, for representatives within a districted system would be held directly accountable by their constituency, and weak councilmen would not be re-elected. Within the current system, it is difficult for citizens to assess the strength and accomplishments of an individual council member as that individual reflects their specific needs and interests. Perhaps a district electoral system would enhance rather than diminish the political strength of councilmen and thereby actually improve representation.

Not surprisingly, most council members who responded to the survey did not consider that their constituents were disadvantaged by the at-large system of election. Perhaps the arguments listed above explain why 67% of respondents did not think citizens are disenfranchised by the at-large system.²⁰ However, though the current policy may have originally resulted from rational decision-making, these attempts to legitimize

¹⁹ David McPhail, former city council member, personal interview, October 21, 2003.

²⁰ City Government Survey.

its continuation lack rational conclusiveness. The present electoral policy is an example of change brought about by conflict to the extent that, prior to 1957, citizens were dissatisfied with their apparently inactive city government. Perhaps the shift to a council-manager system was not the best direction to move, however, and a more incremental change might have been desirable. Nonetheless, the initial change to the council-manager form of government might have been justifiable, and the old system had also been based on at-large election, but it is not the purpose of this analysis to debate that action. At the time the election policy was adopted, it may well have fit the needs of the community. But recently, only 44% of survey participants thought that an at-large system represents best the people of the community.²¹ As the community has grown in size and diversity, the next step toward improving the policy ought to be a shift toward district-specific elections. If the purpose of the government is to serve all of the people, it may be that it is time for a change.

One option for reform of Fond du Lac's city council electoral system can be found by looking to neighboring municipalities. For example, the city of Sheboygan, which exceeds Fond du Lac in population by just over 8,600, employs a mayor-council form of government, and the common council is made up of two members elected to represent each of eight districts. Each electoral district encompasses two wards.²² Recent proposals have been made in Fond du Lac to switch to a mayoral form of government, but that issue falls beyond the focus of this paper. Still, it is interesting to note that 56% of survey respondents favored the current council-manager system over the mayoral form.²³ Regardless of whether the city of Fond du Lac maintains a council-manager system, or switches to a mayoral system, Fond du Lac might be well served to model its elections for council after Sheboygan's. If it were determined that the number of representatives (16) who serve on the Sheboygan council would be excessive for Fond du Lac, perhaps each district could elect only one representative. If districts were to include two wards each, this would require the addition of only one member to the council, since there are presently 16 Fond du Lac wards and seven members serve on the council. Cost

²¹ City Government Survey.

²² City of Sheboygan homepage, available online: www.ci.sheboygan.wi.us/.

²³ City Government Survey

effectiveness at the city level seems to pose at most a minor issue, because the cost of operating a districted system would be equal or only minimally higher than the current system.

Fond du Lac's current city council election policy needs to be evaluated as a whole, comparing apparent outcomes in relation to goals. In light of the problems described in the present study, one can assert logically that the policy of citywide elections does not provide the optimal method to represent Fond du Lac's citizens. The present system gives unbalanced and unchecked political power to a group of persons who reside in a relatively small area of the city in which only a minority of its citizens live. By this measure, over 56% of the people of Fond du Lac may be disenfranchised in that they are represented by someone who lives elsewhere in the city. Furthermore, average citizens are deterred from seeking public office because of high campaign costs.

Analysis from various perspectives indicates that the policy of electing city council members at-large in Fond du Lac is detrimental to the successful functioning of a pluralistic democratic system in which all citizens receive consideration and fair representation. Reform of this policy would benefit citizens in many ways, whether they seek activism as concerned members of the general public or pursue public office. The number of cities in Wisconsin that use the at-large system of election is a pronounced minority, and alternatives are abundantly available through the example of other comparably-sized cities. An alternative to the present policy needs to be found in order to preserve democratic values and strive for social justice in the city. The most logical alternative would be to adopt a system of district representation for the city council. Of all survey respondents, the majority, 56%, believe that a ward system would achieve this goal, yet, respondents were evenly divided as to whether or not the at-large system represents the people best.²⁴ It is clear then, that if the main goal of government is to effectively represent and serve the people, it is time to modify the electoral process to ensure that power is not held by a select few, empowered by the at-large system of election, and to enfranchise, through implementation of a district system, of all citizens according to their democratic right.

²⁴ City Government Survey.

The research conducted for this project demonstrated both strengths and weaknesses. Analysis of information gathered from public record provided a strong demonstration of the concentration of representatives living in the same small region of the city of Fond du Lac. Interviews proved helpful in generating information and allowed for greater insight into former council members' perceptions of the at-large electoral policy. While the survey gave substantial and meaningful data, however, a weakness apparent in the process was the inability of the surveyors to reach certain members of the sample because of lack of accurate mailing addresses.

In order to understand the problems caused by the at-large system more fully, it would be interesting and beneficial to examine the demographics of the Fond du Lac community as a whole in comparison to the demographic make up of the council, particularly with respect to race. More analysis might provide quantitative evidence of disparities induced by the at-large system.

Such further inquiry may expose the inadequacies of the present electoral system, yet more research into alternative policy may prove most valuable. While the focus of this work was limited to a comparison of the at-large and ward systems, it is appropriate that additional research inquire into the possibility of a number of alternate systems of representation as well as their possible consequences. One such alternate policy deserving attention is proportional election, specifically the policy of cumulative voting that has been applied as a solution in cases like that of the South Dakota school district mentioned above. This type of voting preserves the at-large system but modifies it by allowing voters to cast as many votes as there are vacancies, yet distribute these votes as they wish, making it possible to cast several votes for the same candidate in the same election. Such options merit further consideration.

Appendix: City Government Survey

Directions: Please circle the answer which best represents your opinion on the statements.

1. It is less expensive for a candidate to run a campaign for public office within a specific ward system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 2. It is less expensive for a candidate to run a campaign for public office within an at-large system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 3. It is easier for constituents to reach a public official within a ward system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 4. It is easier for constituents to reach a public official within an at-large system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 5. Constituents will be disenfranchised when they are represented by a specific ward system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 6. Constituents will be disenfranchised when they are represented by an at-large system.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 7. A ward system of representation benefits the community best.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 8. An at-large system of representation benefits the community best.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 9. A ward system is most effective for individual citizens to address their needs.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 10. An at-large system is most effective for individual citizens to address their needs.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 11. A ward system represents best the people of the community.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 12. An at-large system represents best the people of the community.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 13. Electing representatives from specific wards would result in greater diversity among public officials.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 14. The city manager system of local government is best for Fond du Lac.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
 15. A mayoral form of local government is best for Fond du Lac.
Strongly Agree Agree Neutral Disagree Strongly Disagree
-

Directions: Please provide a short answer to the question.

16. How did you develop your interest in public service?
17. What motivated you to seek public office?
18. Are you currently serving in public office? If so, what is your position? If not, did you serve in any public office since leaving the Fond du Lac city council, but before today's date? (If yes, please list positions)

Directions: Please select the answer that best applies to you.

19. Years served on the Fond du Lac city council ____
20. Age: 30-34____ 35-39____ 40-44____ 45-49____ 50-54____ 55-59____ 60-64____ 65-69____ 70-74____ Over 75____
21. Gender: Female____ Male____
22. Annual income: \$30,000- \$39,000____ \$40,000-\$49,000____ \$50,000-\$59,000____ \$60,000-\$69,000____ \$70,000-\$79,000____ \$80,000-\$89,000____ \$90,000-\$99,000____ \$100,000-\$109,000____ Over \$110,000____
23. Check the highest grade completed: Less than high school graduate____, Graduated high school____, Some College____, College Graduate____, Some post-graduate____, Post-graduate degree____
24. Occupation: County/State employee____, Small business owner____, Manufacturer____, Educator(school system)____, Administrative Assistant____, Student____, Military____, Retired____, Other____
25. Please check the political affiliation that applies to you: Republican____, Democrat____, Independent____, Other____
26. What ward do you live in? (If not currently serving on city council, what ward did you live in during your time of office?) Ward 1____, Ward 2____, Ward 3____, Ward 4____, Ward 5____, Ward 6____, Ward 7____, Ward 8____, Ward 9____, Ward 10____, Ward 11____, Ward 12____, Ward 13____, Ward 14____, Ward 15____, Ward 16____

Moore and Galloway Lumber Mill

**Timber Boom Town:
The Rise and Decline of the Lumber Industry in Fond du Lac,
1845-1922
Jennifer Stobbe**

A visitor who walked the streets of Fond du Lac along its river during the 1870s and 1880s could see numerous lumber mills, accompanied by the sound of great saws continuously cutting into logs that had been brought to the mills. The sound was a constant hum that droned through the entire day and into the night. Walking among the piles of the sawdust and wood debris, the visitor could see many men, women and children, covered in sawdust and shavings, making their way home after a long shift at the mill. Through the years of the timber boom Fond du Lac newspapers reported on the annoyances that accompanied the mills, including loud late-night comings and goings of the male mill workers. However, toward the end of the century the newspapers ceased to complain about the “lazy loafing, beer guzzling, smoking, chewing loafers . . . that abound in Fond du Lac” and had been sources of irritation.¹ The once-bustling mills that made Fond du Lac a thriving center of the lumber industry had closed, moved, or burned, and little visible evidence of the previous commercial activity remained.

The city of Fond du Lac, despite its impressive lumber boom of the late nineteenth century, did not remain a major milling town. By 1888 the State of Wisconsin, as a whole, had reached its lumbering peak, but the industry had already been declining in Fond du Lac for more than a decade.² Reasons for the decline of this industry in Fond du Lac are easy to identify. The city lacked significant advantages that other cities, such as Oshkosh, could offer the business, including a better location on Lake Winnebago closer to the sources of the timber and ample storage facilities for the logs. Over time, water levels in some regional rivers dropped, including the Fond du Lac River, making flotation and storage of logs difficult or impossible. The northward spread of the railroad network

¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 2, 1955.

² Robert. C. Nesbit, *The History of Wisconsin, v. III: Urbanization and Industrialization, 1873-1893* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 48.

in the state eliminated a major competitive advantage that Fond du Lac had enjoyed. Another major blow came in 1876, when the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad removed its car shops from the city. Subsequently, fires destroyed most of the mills, forcing a decision by owners either to rebuild or to move their mills to more economically advantageous areas closer to the source of raw material. Fond du Lac thus quickly lost its initial appeal to the lumbering industry.

The timber industry in Wisconsin was initially connected to the state's hydrography. Six river systems permitted logs to be moved from the forests to the mills where they were prepared for market. The Menomonee and Wolf Rivers connected the northeastern Wisconsin woods to Green Bay and Lake Michigan, while the Wisconsin River drained Central Wisconsin from the northern borders and flowed to the Mississippi River and Prairie du Chien. The Black, Chippewa, and St. Croix Rivers flowed out of Northwestern Wisconsin and into the Mississippi.³ Fond du Lac's natural location on Lake Winnebago initially created an ideal setting for the logging industry. In the city, the natural waterways of Lake Winnebago and the Fond du Lac River provided a good harbor for steamboats and barges as well as storage room for the supply of timber and logs needed by the numerous mills that were constructed there. Fond du Lac was located closer to the eventual destination of the finished timber to the south, and it possessed railroad links by 1851.⁴

Logging was seasonal in early Wisconsin. Winter conditions and snow made it easier to drag timber from the woods to the waterways. Labor was also more readily available, since many of the farmers who lived in and around Fond du Lac could move north during the winter months when there was little work to be done on the farms. They took advantage of the opportunity to find work cutting the logs that would eventually be processed in the mills along the Fond du Lac River.

The logging camps where they lived were typically small and cozy, but entirely masculine, for no women were allowed in the camps. According to W.A. Holt, sleeping

³ Walker D. Wyman, *The Lumberjack Frontier: The Life of a Logger in the Early Days on the Chippeway Retold Recollections of Louie Blanchard* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), 8.

⁴ *Fond du Lac Journal*, July 17, 1851.

houses were about thirty feet wide, and thirty feet long.⁵ In many cases a single window and a skylight provided the only ventilation. Kerosene lamps and lanterns provided the lumberjacks with evening light. During the cold winter nights of Wisconsin, the men slept in bedding made from straw or hay and used two to three blankets and a heavy quilt to keep warm. As time passed, more modern camps were roofed with lumber and tarpaper and provided the men with better lighting and ventilation.

The cook camp of a logging operation was similar in shape to the bunkhouse; however, it was much cleaner and more attractive looking, because it was kept orderly and clean. Long benches and tables lined the walls at which the lumbermen consumed their meals. A universal rule within the lumber camps was that talking was forbidden while the men were eating their meals, and not a single man was allowed to get up and leave until the last man had finished eating. A typical diet included bean or pea soup, salted pork or beef, baked beans, potatoes, cabbage or beets, dried apples or peaches, doughnuts, pies, and tea or coffee. As the railroads reached the camps, so did fresh beef and pork, sausage and bacon, and canned vegetables to supplement the diet of the loggers.⁶

The men were unable to bathe from fall to spring for two significant reasons. In the winter, when much of the work in the forests was done, all of the waterways were frozen and consequently there was no natural place to bathe. Bathing facilities were not provided, because it was thought to be unhealthy to bathe. Yet hygiene was not completely ignored. Due to infestations of lice, the men boiled their clothing every three to four weeks; many of the men also believed that smoking discouraged the lice.

The almost monastic discipline enforced in the camps was tempered by rough and ready recreation that was available to the men in nearby communities. These small towns lived off the earnings of the men who cut timber in the woods. Many northern Wisconsin towns such as Hayward and Hurley developed unsavory if well-deserved reputations for their bars, gambling dens, and houses of prostitution.

⁵ William A. Holt. *A Wisconsin Lumberman Looks Backwards*, (Unpublished manuscript State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1948), 34.

⁶ Holt, 35.

Within the forests, before the railroads made their way northward, white pine was the preferred 'cut' of the lumberjacks, because the light softwood held its dimensions well and resisted rot.⁷ The soft wood was also preferred because it could be worked easily and was straight-grained. The trees were dropped by a 'faller,' who then proceeded to slim them down by removing large branches with a crosscut saw. Crosscut saws were composed of a large saw blade about six feet long with a wooden handle on each end that allowed two men to pull the blade back and forth to cut the trees. After the trees were limbed, scaled, and marked with a stamp hammer to identify the owner, they were cut to length by a 'bucking crew.' Ox teams, led by a teamster, dragged the logs to the banks of the Wolf River, where they could be rafted downstream in the spring through Lake Poygan and Lake Butte de Morts to Lake Winnebago. From there the logs were pushed across the lake by tugboats into the Fond du Lac River and ended their journey at the mills located along its banks. Both the men who had cut the trees and the logs traveled to Fond du Lac in the spring. Sometimes the men themselves even rode the logs.

Logjams often occurred, sometimes extending several miles along the river. Skilled drivers, known as 'river pigs,' worked the logs downstream and were in charge of the dangerous job of breaking up logjams. Often the jams were eliminated by the use of explosives, making the job of the river pig a doubly dangerous one.

A massive logjam occurred on the Chippewa River in 1869. It was estimated that 130,000 feet of logs piled up, twenty to fifty logs deep, two miles back from the obstruction. However, the most famous logjam in Wisconsin occurred along the Thornapple River in northern Wisconsin near Winter. A conflict between John F. Deitz and the Chippewa Lumber and Boom Company occurred over a disagreement between Deitz and the company heads over approximately \$9,000 in tolls and back wages from October 1900 to April 1905. Deitz believed that the lumber company did not have a right to float logs through the dam on the Thornapple River, which flowed through his property, so long as that bill remained unpaid. In April 1905 he stopped the log drive by closing the dam, preventing any logs from passing down the river. Deitz kept the lumbermen, lawyers, and sheriffs at bay for two years, until July 25, 1906, when shots

⁷ Nesbit, 47.

were exchanged between the Deitz family and the Sawyer County Sheriff. As news of the event spread in newspapers, the entire nation was engaged by the conflict, with many taking sides with one of the two parties. On September 6, 1907, an agreement was reached between the two disputants, and by March 1908 crews from Weyerhaeuser had removed \$45,000 worth of logs from the empty flowage basin along the Thornapple River.⁸

Although water was a cheaper mode of transport than the railroad, many problems arose from use of waterways for transportation for logs. A drive would have to be aborted if there was too little water in the rivers or lakes, for low levels meant an inevitable hang-up of the logs. However, should flooding occur within the rivers and lakes, the logs could easily float in many directions, ending up in farmers' fields and pastures. Logs also had a tendency to rot and become infested with insects if they were left in the water for long periods of time.

Once pushed into the Wolf River, the logs floated south until they reached Lake Poygan, where steam-powered tug boats pulled them through Lake Poygan, Lake Butte de Morts, and Lake Winnebago into the Fond du Lac River, a distance totaling about forty-five miles. By 1853 David Hume of Omro, Wisconsin, had designed a steam-powered boat engineered with a 'grouser pole,' a long vertical wooden pole that ran through the forward deck of the boat and could be driven into the riverbed.⁹ This pole held the boat in place while it hauled the log rafts through the lakes by means of a winch. Once in the Fond du Lac River, the logs were floated to the mills, where they were extracted from the water by the mill workers. It was a difficult and expensive task to get the logs downstream, sorted according to owner, and ready to be milled. A.T. Glaze describes the process well in *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin Past and Present*, "Persons without experience have little idea of the expense and difficulties of getting logs down the small streams on which they were banked from the woods, running them on the river to the

⁸ Dave Carlson, "Now It's All Peaceful At Cameron Dam" in *Our Story: The Chippewa Valley and Beyond*. (Eau Claire Leader Telegram, 1976).

⁹ Tim Casiana, "Down the Not-So Lazy River: Commercial Steamboats in the Fox River Valley, 1843-1900," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac* (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 191.

boom, getting them through the sorting race and rafting them ready for the mills.”¹⁰ It was clearly a dangerous and complex process.

Fond du Lac lumber mills were simple in their structure. A shed, typically over 100 feet in length, contained the saw, and there might be offices and storage facilities that made up the rest of the yard. Early mills were powered by a water wheel; later, a boiler house with a characteristic tall brick chimney contained the steam engine that powered the saw and winches that could move the heavy logs. A ramp from the river permitted logs to be dragged or hoisted through the shed onto a trolley where the saw or saws were located. Passes of the trolley through the blade were repeated until the log had been transformed into rough-cut planks of various sizes. The circular saw was the saw of choice for many of the mill owners in Fond du Lac to cut the logs into marketable planks. A Chicago journalist reported that on July 25, 1866, out of the eleven mills that were in operation in Fond du Lac, nine ran using one circular saw apiece, while two of the mills possessed two circular saws.¹¹ Boards were planed, sorted, and stored in racks or piles on the premises until they were ready to be shipped by boat, wagon, or rail.

In 1888, a mature white pine tree cut into four or five logs, each sixteen feet long, produced one hundred forty to two hundred board feet of lumber. Five to seven logs were needed to make 1000 board feet. By 1897, as the mature forests became less plentiful along the Wolf, it took ten smaller logs to obtain 1000 board feet of marketable lumber.

After the lumber had been cut and readied for market, it was typically loaded on Chicago & Northwestern Railroad cars and shipped, in most cases without reloading, throughout the United States to places such as Tennessee, West Virginia, and Iowa. The manufactured lumber was utilized in building houses, factories, and other buildings, as well as for manufacture of furniture such as tables, chairs, and beds.¹²

Much of the economic life of early Fond du Lac revolved around its lumber mills. Lumber mills constituted one of the first industries in Fond du Lac. In the city, as with other areas of early settlement, the need for finished lumber was immediate. Dr. Mason

¹⁰ Maurice McKenna, *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin Past and Present*, (Chicago: the S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1912), 110.

¹¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 25, 1866.

¹² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 22, 1867.

C. Darling was responsible for the erection of the first sawmill in Fond du Lac in 1845.¹³ Darling agreed that John J. Driggs and Warren Morley could have the opportunity to purchase one of his lots providing that they constructed a mill on the property.¹⁴ After the mill was completed, the men would obtain full ownership of the land. This mill building was twenty-four by thirty-six feet. Located on the north side of Western Avenue in Fond du Lac, the mill utilized an old-fashioned sash saw, with its large blades that cut in a reciprocating vertical motion instead of a circular rotational motion.

The legal change of possession for the Darling property took place on July 11, 1846, when the mill was erected; Darling received one-hundred-sixty-five dollars for his parcel of land.¹⁵ Shortly after the contract became final, Driggs sold his share of the mill to Truman Wheeler, and the mill became known as the Wheeler Morley Mill.¹⁶ Wheeler's death in 1847 led to a temporary halt of work at the mill. In August 1849, Horace Seymour took it over and planned improvements. In September 1849, Herman Bissell tried to purchase the mill, but a flaw in the title of the land prevented him from acquiring the entire mill. Herman Bissell's son, L.C. Bissell, ran the operation. Bissell's mill was able to turn out 2,500 board feet of lumber per day.¹⁷ Bissell continued to run the mill until 1855, when the firm ceased to operate as a result of damage to the dam that powered the mill.¹⁸

A.G. Ruggles and Cornelius Davis proposed building Fond du Lac's first steam-powered lumber mill in 1845.¹⁹ By 1847 the mill was in operation, using timber that was logged along the Wolf River and rafted to Fond du Lac. By 1866 Fond du Lac had fifteen sawmills that cut about 90 million board feet annually. The lumber industry reached its peak in Fond du Lac in 1873, with eighteen lumber and shingle mills occupying the banks

¹³ Dr. Mason Darling was the man responsible for creating the village of what was to become the city of Fond du Lac. Darling was also the city's first mayor.

¹⁴ Biographical information is lacking for Driggs and Morley in the Fond du Lac Historical Society Collection.

¹⁵ *History of Fond du Lac County Wisconsin (1880)*, (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 641-642.

¹⁶ Truman Wheeler arrived in Fond du Lac in 1844 by way of an old Indian trail.

¹⁷ *History of Fond du Lac County Wisconsin*, 640.

¹⁸ Biological data for Herman Bissell and L.C. Bissell are lacking in the Fond du Lac Historical Society collection.

¹⁹ A.G. Ruggles was born in 1822. He arrived in Fond du Lac in 1846. In 1848 he left the lumber business for real estate, then banking. Cornelius Davis arrived in Fond du Lac around 1844.

of the Fond du Lac River. Among the eighteen mills engaged in finishing and manufacturing lumber and wood products in Fond du Lac, the September 14, 1874 *Fond du Lac Journal* identified nine that were handling and processing felled trees:

Name of Mill	Number of Men Employed
C.J.L Meyer	140
Chicago & Northwestern Railroad	30
U.D. Mihills	90
Merriman and Company	50
Moore, Galloway, & Baker	60
G. W. Sexmith	53
Alex McDonald	40
J.Q. Griffith & Sons	40
Hamilton & Finley	43

The number of employees gives some indication of the relative size of each enterprise, but operation tended to be seasonal, with spring and summer being the main periods of work. During 1874, these nine mills collectively manufactured 67,000,000 feet of lumber, valued at \$1 million.

The Moore & Galloway mill, located on Packer Street near McWilliams Street, was the last lumber mill to remain in operation in Fond du Lac. The mill began operations in 1864 when M.D Moore, a dry goods merchant, invested in a sawmill built by Charles Crane.²⁰ Charles Crane had erected the mill in 1863, but he soon became financially dependent upon Moore. The two men ran the mill through an unusual partnership; one week Moore ran the mill and the next week Crane took over. Each man worked with the same crew; however, the lumber that was cut each week was kept separate from that belonging to the other partner. In 1866, Moore bought out Crane's share of the business, and Edwin H. Galloway became Moore's partner.²¹ E.H. Galloway was already in the lumber business; he was part owner of the Galloway Hunter Mill. When Galloway retired from the business later in 1866, his brother, C.A. Galloway, took over his shares in both businesses. The two companies merged, and the firm became known as Moore, Galloway, and Baker. W.E Baker was a partner in the business for three years from 1870

²⁰ M.D. Moore was born in 1825. He arrived in Fond du Lac in 1864, and he was soon regarded as among the most successful businessmen of Wisconsin. He died in either 1902 or 1903; histories of the county differ on the date. Biographical information on Charles Crane is lacking.

²¹ E.H. Galloway was born in 1831. He came to Fond du Lac from the state of New York in 1848 to engage in the lumbering business, which he quit in 1866.

to 1873, at which time the enterprise employed between eighty and one hundred-fifty men.²² By 1884, the company was known as the Moore and Galloway Lumber Company, the name it carried until its demise in 1922. Despite the fact that in 1887 C.A. Galloway left the company to become the first president of First National Bank, the firm continued to bear his name.²³

Throughout the years leading up to its closing, the Moore and Galloway Lumber Company continued to grow in size, labor force and productivity. In 1867 M.D. Moore's one-saw mill cut two million board feet of lumber.²⁴ Through most of the first decade of the mill's operation, the mill operated with only a single circular saw. Ten years later, *Hollands Fond du Lac City Directory for 1875-1876* reported that the Moore, Galloway, and Baker Company had the ability to cut seven million board feet of lumber per season. Contributing to this great accomplishment of productive capacity was the company's unique pioneering use of the gang saw in place of the then-typical circular saw. The gang saw was made up of several blades moving up and down in a frame, so that a log could be sliced into several boards at once. By 1880, the company employed between eighty and one hundred-fifty men seasonally, and had the capability to put out 5-8 ½ million board feet of lumber per season. In 1912 the mill employed 260 men and had annual sales of \$614,000.²⁵

Success did not come without adversity. The Moore and Galloway lumber mill suffered from three major fires during its years of operation. The first occurred on the night of June 28, 1888. This fire caused a total loss of \$20-25,000.²⁶ According to published accounts, the fire began in the mill's boiler room, and within a short period the entire mill was in flames. The night watchman might have contained the fire with pails of water, force pumps, and hoses, possibly lessening the loss, but in the excitement he panicked. According to the June 29, 1888 *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, at the time of the fire the mill had the capacity to produce 70,000 board feet of lumber per day, and

²² *The History of Fond du Lac County Wisconsin*, 646.

²³ *Fond du Lac Times*, October 5 1977.

²⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 22, 1867.

²⁵ McKenna, 267.

²⁶ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, October 25, 1895.

the loss came during the heart of the season. Company owners debated whether to rebuild the mill in Fond du Lac or to cease operations.

Due to the fact that the firm had enough felled timber still in the upper Wolf River to stay in business eight to ten years, the stock holders decided that their firm should continue operations, but they decided not to rebuild the Fond du Lac plant in its old location. To rebuild their business, in October 1888, Moore, Galloway, and the other company stockholders decided to purchase the site of the C.J.L. Meyer Mill, located on Doty Street.²⁷ This factory, too, had burned on September 22, 1888. Plans to rebuild on the old mill site, utilizing six million board feet of lumber that was on hand from the company, were immediately put into action. The new mill was equipped to produce 40,000 board feet of lumber per day. The building itself measured 30 by 120 feet.²⁸

Moore and Galloway faced its greatest challenge on September 22, 1895, when another massive fire destroyed this new mill. Though fires were rather commonplace in sawmills, this conflagration was the most destructive in the history of the Moore and Galloway Lumber Company. When the fire finally burned out, it had destroyed all of the lumber in the Moore and Galloway Lumber Company mill, the two buildings comprising the Fond du Lac Iron Company plant, two freight cars, and eight stock cars owned by the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad.²⁹ The fire, which was thought to have been started by a cigar, moved swiftly along its path of destruction, despite the best efforts of the fire department. Extremely windy conditions and lack of an efficient water supply sealed the facility's fate.

A substantial effort was made to save the mill by using fire hoses, which sprayed as much water as was available on the buildings, and by transporting barrels of water that were then dumped on the roofs of buildings. Despite these efforts to contain the fire, two buildings were completely destroyed. One of the destroyed buildings was a warehouse for sashes, doors, and blinds, while the other was a small office. Moore was reported as saying that the mill itself could not be replaced for less than \$30,000, but that only eight

²⁷ C.J.L Meyer was born in 1831. He arrived in Fond du Lac in either 1855 or 1856 where he served as a lumberman and manufacturer as well as a city alderman, supervisor, and mayor.

²⁸ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, October 25, 1895.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 23, 1895.

million feet of lumber had burned, due to the fact that most of it had been quickly hauled to other yards. When questioned as to whether or not he was planning on rebuilding he replied, "It is doubtful, I don't know if Fond du Lac wants another sawmill. . . . Twenty years ago there were a score of saw mills in this city, and the one that burned yesterday was the last."³⁰ The total damage of the fire for the Moore and Galloway Lumber Company was estimated to be \$165,000.³¹

Despite Moore's reservations, Moore and Galloway Lumber Company did rebuild after the 1895 fire. The new mill was constructed at the original C.E. Crane Mill site, the location where the fire of 1888 occurred. According to Ed Halle, a man whose hobby was to collect information on the sawmills in Fond du Lac, a third fire occurred in 1904 or 1905, and the company again rebuilt the mill in 1905.

Another successful lumber mill in Fond du Lac was the C.J.L. Meyer mill, which was erected in 1868 and had become the largest manufacturing mill in Fond du Lac in 1874. C.J.L. Meyer retained possession of his mill until 1888, when it was sold to Moore and Galloway Lumber Company. Meyer constructed this sawmill with the intentions of using the finished lumber it produced in his already established manufacturing shops. The mill had the capacity to produce 80,000 board feet of lumber per day.³² The *1880-1884 Holland's Directory* states that the company employed 900 men.

A portion of C.J.L. Meyer's success can be attributed to the Chicago Fire of 1871. Meyer was fortunate that his planing mill and lumberyard, already established in Chicago, were not touched by that fire. By enlarging his manufacturing operation in Fond du Lac as well as utilizing his surviving resources in Chicago, Meyer, with his ample supply of finished lumber, was able to capitalize on the opportunity provided by the need to rebuild the city of Chicago.

Meyer's company in Chicago was a success. Another of his greatly admired accomplishments was the establishment of the town of Hermansville. Meyer purchased 50,000 acres of timberland in Michigan, just north of Menomonee, Michigan, due to his concern over the depletion of available timber along the Wolf River. By 1879 the first

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 23, 1895.

³¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 1, 1955.

³² *The History of Fond du Lac County Wisconsin (1880)*, 648.

saw mill was in operation in this area, with the finished lumber sent to Fond du Lac for use at Meyer's sash, door, and blind factories. By 1880, Meyer had over 900 people on his payroll, 300 in the Chicago shops, over 200 in Hermansville, and 400 in Fond du Lac.³³

Meyer is also attributed with creating the largest sawmill in the state in 1888. According to the *Fond du Lac Journal*, the entire investment amounted to over \$50,000. Constructing the mill required that a new channel be dredged from Lake Winnebago to the mill site, measuring 900 feet long, 60 feet wide, and seven feet deep, allowing ample room to float the logs. It took over 300,000 feet of lumber to construct the mill's building. The mill measured 130 feet long, 60 feet wide, and 50 feet high. It contained a 100 horse power engine, three boilers, and a brick smoke stack that was larger than that of any other mill in Fond du Lac.³⁴

The Meyer enterprise's demise came at the hand of his son, Julius P. Meyer. In December 1889, Meyer went bankrupt on his investments, including his Chicago company, his various businesses in Fond du Lac, and his interests in Hermansville. Julius P. Meyer had been placed in charge of his father's business affairs in Chicago. Though it appeared as though the company was prospering, Meyer found out in a December 8, 1889 letter from Julius that his son had been "willfully misrepresenting conditions, and misappropriating funds" from the company, resulting in a loss of over \$200,000. The Chicago business was initially the only one that was scheduled for termination, but eventually Meyer's interests in Chicago, Fond du Lac, and Hermansville were all liquidated.³⁵

The failure of Meyer's business in Fond du Lac had a great impact on the citizens of the city, where the economic consequences of the various closures were felt deeply. The December 26, 1889 issue of the *Fond du Lac Journal* reported that the payroll of various Meyer industries in Fond du Lac amounted to over \$2,000 per week. When the mill was forced to close for a short time while the legal issues were worked out, the result was a significant blow to many. Meyer's firm's demise also created sympathy for him

³³ *The History of Fond du Lac County Wisconsin*, 648.

³⁴ *Fond du Lac Journal*, June 25, 1888.

³⁵ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, December 20, 1889.

from local citizens. Various articles in Fond du Lac newspapers describe citizens' concern for Meyer's plight. The *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* reported that "wherever he (Meyer) is known he has friends who will hope that he may find a happy issue out of his financial distress."³⁶ The *Fond du Lac Journal* also noted that "he certainly has the confidence, sympathy, and good will of every citizen in his efforts to bring his affairs to order."³⁷ Unfortunately, Meyer never recovered from the collapse of his business.

As has been noted, sawmill fires were a constant threat to life and property in the city of Fond du Lac during the booming days of the lumber industry. The fires were quite costly to the mill owners, and as the city became further removed from the source of timber, it became less and less economically sound to rebuild burned sawmills in Fond du Lac.

Changes in the city itself also diminished Fond du Lac's ability to support the industry. The large logs used by sawmills needed a considerable amount of water to float them to the mills. Gradually, sediment in the rivers made rafting the timber more and more difficult. As the rivers began to fill up with silt from area farms, deforested slopes and with wood particles from the mills themselves, the logs could no longer be floated via rivers to the mills. For example, thousands of feet of sunken, water saturated logs now lie at the bottom of Lake Poygan as the result of the log runs. The small tributaries of the Wolf River that had once carried large logs without a problem became so constricted that, during the later nineteenth century, they could no longer be used for the log runs, because the logs repeatedly became hung up on shallow bars that appeared in the rivers. River water levels in the southern Lake Winnebago area became so low that waterways that once had carried "daily traffic of steamboats could barely float a log."³⁸

Already in 1863, there was discussion about widening the channel of the Fond du Lac River from its mouth as far south as Scott Street, because its capacity had become reduced to only half what was required to handle the needs of the local lumber industry. As a result of this blockage, many of the logs used by the mills had to be stored in the Fox River near Oshkosh and were only brought down to Fond du Lac when the mills were

³⁶ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth*, December 20, 1889.

³⁷ *Fond du Lac Journal*, December 26, 1889.

³⁸ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 2, 1955.

ready to process them. The engineering plan was to dredge out the banks of the river to widen it to 60 feet and increase its depth to about four feet. Again, in 1886, the *Fond du Lac Journal* made reference to the river channel being unusually low and to the difficulty experienced in floating logs through it.

The spread of rail transport in Wisconsin was an additional factor in diminishing Fond du Lac's competitive standing in the timber industry. By the 1880s, the penetration of the railroads into the northern forests of Wisconsin brought a much-desired end to the use of waterways for the transportation of logs. While some water transportation of timber continued until the end of the century, the sawmill industry largely moved from Fond du Lac northward. Much time and money was saved by the ability to cut logs in the woods, load them on railroad cars, and have the railroad ship the raw materials to the mills to be processed. The railroads allowed the industry to move north into the forests themselves.

Even after the handling of logs in the city's industry became a thing of the past, for a time Fond du Lac continued to be a center for the manufacture of wood products, especially sashes, doors, and blinds, but by the end of the nineteenth century, it was no longer economically feasible to keep mills that processed rough logs into boards in operation in Fond du Lac. The raw materials were located far away and increasingly difficult to get to Fond du Lac. Railroads were available to carry the finished products to market from more remote mills. The first mill to leave Fond du Lac and move north was the Labelle Wagon Works, which was sold for \$180,000 and was shipped to Superior, where it was eventually abandoned.³⁹ All the mills in Fond du Lac that did not burn or simply cease operations were eventually sold and relocated north. The last mill in Fond du Lac, Moore and Galloway Lumber Company, stayed in full operation until 1922, when it was completely abandoned.⁴⁰ The abandoned mill structure remained intact until Moore and Galloway Lumber Company sold it to Henry Nickel, a local contractor. The mill buildings were destroyed in 1935.⁴¹ With this, the last remnants of the sawmill industry, once paramount Fond du Lac, disappeared.

³⁹ *Commonwealth Reporter*, November 2, 1955.

⁴⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 31, 1955.

⁴¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 7, 1935.

Workers at Moore and Galloway Lumber Mill with Circular Saw Blade

St. Paul Depot and East Branch of the Fond du Lac River

Fond du Lac's Railroads and Economic Development 1851-1876

Laura Knueppel

On July 10, 1851, according to the *Fond du Lac Journal*, thousands of people congregated near the corner of West Division and Brooke streets, the site of the formal celebration inaugurating the Rock River Valley Union Railroad. According to the author of this article, many people of Fond du Lac were dubious about the proposed route of the railroad, but on this particular day those skeptical views were forgotten.

Businesses closed their shops and the lumber mills closed by noon on this important weekday. The railroad delegates were received with booming cannons, waving flags, and cheering people. There was a parade through the village, and the procession stopped at the site where the construction was scheduled to begin. The Honorable Mason C. Darling was the leader of the celebration and gave the opening address.¹ Darling, Fond du Lac's first mayor, first physician, and a prominent land speculator and politician, had moved to Fond du Lac in 1838 and became a Wisconsin Congressman in 1848.² As one of Fond du Lac's first pioneers, he had been part of the history of Fond du Lac from its first permanent settlement in 1836 to that day.³

Darling introduced Abraham Hyatt Smith, the President of the Rock River Valley Union Railroad. Smith, a lawyer, businessman, politician, and land speculator, had moved to Janesville, Wisconsin in 1842. He was a promoter of waterpower, plank roads, and railroad construction in the state and served as mayor of Janesville and later served as the United States Assessor of Internal Revenue in President Andrew Johnson's administration.⁴ As Smith lifted the first shovelful of sod the audience cheered, cannons roared, and the band played on.⁵

The festivities continued into the evening as Edward S. Bragg served as the toastmaster at the celebratory dinner. Bragg was another important Fond du Lac figure at this time. He and his family had moved to Fond du Lac from New York in 1850. He

¹ *Fond du Lac Journal*, July 17, 1851.

² *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1960), 95.

³ Cindy Barden, *Foot of the Lake: An Early History of Fond du Lac Wisconsin*, (Fond du Lac: Fond du Lac Public Library, 1998), 15, 18-19.

⁴ *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*, 330.

⁵ *Fond du Lac Journal*, July 17, 1851.

later became a Fond du Lac District Attorney, in 1854, and also served as a general in the Union Army during the Civil War.⁶ As Bragg toasted the audience he stated:

Walworth County--Though last on the line of the road in Wisconsin, may she be first in her contributions for the great enterprise of the state.
Rock County---Like the rock that Moses smote, it contains in its bosom a fountain that shall refresh a thirsty people.
Jefferson County--Not unlike the illustrious statesman after whom she was christened, she loves freedom and is bound to pursue it with an iron horse.
Dodge County--Her iron ore, the Valley road the magic wand that turns it into gold.
Fond du Lac County--She cannot wait to go east by water.⁷

These words were intended to suggest what the railroads in Wisconsin could do and what they would do for Fond du Lac County. The Rock River Valley Union was a way to bind the counties of Central Wisconsin together and make possible their industrial development.

Existing forms of transportation did not meet the needs of the settlers in Fond du Lac County as they began to move beyond subsistence farming. When people began settling in the Fond du Lac area, one of the first necessities was roads. These first roads, no more than dirt paths, were difficult to traverse when bad weather occurred, so a new, more secure form of road construction was developed. These second-generation roads were plank roads. The old dirt tracks were covered with heavy wooden planks. But these new roads also became impassible because of decay and lack of proper maintenance by their owners, for they were privately financed and maintained. Water transportation was also available for the Fond du Lac area. Lake Winnebago, the Fox River, and the Wolf River were the keys to regional water transportation, for they could link Fond du Lac to points to the south and to the Great Lakes.⁸ Railroads, however, were the most practical of transportation improvements available. They were faster than roads and were passable in almost all climatic conditions. They didn't freeze in winter or lose necessary depth to accommodate boats in the summer, like lakes, canals, and rivers, and they were not blocked by topography such as the rapids that made the Lower Fox River impassable to

⁶ Barden, 24.

⁷ Maurice McKenna, *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin Past and Present*, (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing, 1912), 187.

⁸ McKenna, 183.

any craft larger than a canoe. Railroads would ensure Fond du Lac County's economic growth, their promoters claimed, although most people, both locally and statewide, could hardly understand just how important railroads would become.

In 1847 the average railroad line in the United States was only nineteen miles long, and the idea that railways would one day link distant locations and enhance economic growth was envisioned by only a few. Railroads in the early days signified a mode of transportation that was only local in nature. People merely saw railroads as a method to connect a port to an interior destination that was in reality only a few miles away. At a cost of \$20,000 to \$25,000 per mile, the price of construction alone was seen as prohibitive, even to the visionaries.⁹ Manpower, resources, and lack of honest leadership made Wisconsin's first attempts at railway growth a disappointing venture for many.

Additionally, although many of Fond du Lac's pioneers had immigrated from the East at a time when the railroads were first becoming popular in America, they were suspicious of the new invention. Some thought that the huge expense of building a railroad would make it impractical. It was difficult for them to envision the economic consequences that railroads were to have for the city and state of Wisconsin.¹⁰

On June 5, 1848, Nelson Dewey, the first governor of Wisconsin, a lawyer and land speculator, delivered his first message to the new legislature of a state that was less than a week old. Dewey alluded to the possible advantages of new forms of transportation when he stated, "Wisconsin possesses the natural elements, fostered by the judicious system of legislation, to become one of the most populous and prosperous States of the American Union." It would only be a matter of time until Wisconsin joined the many other states which were developing railroads for economic purposes. He also stated that Wisconsin possessed a unique geographical destiny. According to Dewey, to achieve this destiny Wisconsin could not solely rely on its waterways for transportation. At the time during which Wisconsin became a state, American railroads had been under

⁹ Robert C. Nesbit, *Wisconsin a History*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1989), 203.

¹⁰ Nesbit, 204.

construction and operating for more than twenty years, and Dewey clearly was signaling the interest of the state government in fostering their development.¹¹

Early Wisconsin political leaders believed that railroads were essential in the development of Wisconsin and its industries. Railroads were generally welcomed in Wisconsin, but not by all its citizens. Advocates considered railroads as the prime means of making natural resources available to people in both Wisconsin and around America. On the other hand, skeptics were afraid of the financial burden that railroad construction would place on such a new and relatively underpopulated state. Construction costs were very high when railroad construction began in Wisconsin, partly because many of the contractors and their engineers were unfamiliar with the products.

Corruption was also a problem. Some railroad contractors were company officials, and they padded their own pay. Wisconsin railroad entrepreneurs thought that by bringing in experienced contractors the costs would decline, but instead they continued to climb. For example, the Kilbourn and La Crosse Company initially charged Wisconsin \$7,000 per mile for railroad construction and later raised its price to as much as \$21,875. The company was able to do this because railroads were in such high demand, and there were few who could carry out the work.

Despite the inflated costs, Wisconsin entrepreneurs stayed with the experienced contractors, because they believed that the faster they built the railroads, the faster they would be in business. Wisconsin railroad construction was also plagued by contractors' financial irresponsibility in dealing with their own employees. The workers were generally newly-arrived immigrants or farmers who lived along the route of the planned construction. The laborers' starting pay was usually seventy-five cents a day, but this pay wasn't always guaranteed. In 1855, a Wisconsin state law made railroad companies responsible for all labor on railroad construction projects and required contractors to put up bonds that were high enough to guarantee payment of laborers' wages.¹²

¹¹ Richard Current, *The History of Wisconsin, v. II: The Civil War Era, 1848-1873*, (Madison: The State Historical Society, 1976), 1-3.

¹² Current, 35-36.

The first railroad constructed in Wisconsin was the Milwaukee and Waukesha line. On September 12, 1850, workmen spiked down the first rails laid in Wisconsin. This railroad was later renamed Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad Company in order to reflect company plans for expansion westward beyond the state of Wisconsin. Between 1850 and 1860, railroad mileage in Wisconsin increased from twenty to 922.5 miles.¹³ Due to a temporary national financial crisis and the threat of impending Civil War, the year 1860 saw a hiatus in railroad construction. By 1867, only 130 additional miles of track had been laid.¹⁴

Fond du Lac played a role in the first boom in construction of railroads in Wisconsin. By 1836, the city of Fond du Lac was beginning to be settled, and by 1850 Fond du Lac had 1,940 residents.¹⁵ Fond du Lac County had a population of 14,510 in that year, and this meant that Fond du Lac ranked eleventh among the thirty-two Wisconsin counties.¹⁶ Fond du Lac County also ranked in the upper one-half to one-third among Wisconsin counties with respect to wealth and economic development, even though geographic location gave other counties natural advantages over Fond du Lac, due to their better access to markets and to water transportation routes. However, these geographic disadvantages disappeared as the railroads replaced waterways as the primary mode of transportation. Railroads soon did for Fond du Lac what waterways had done for other counties, much to Fond du Lac's competitive advantage.¹⁷

Thus the Rock River Valley Union Railroad was a key to Fond du Lac's economic development. The Rock River Valley Union Railroad was an outgrowth of the Madison and Beloit Railroad. This company had been chartered by the Wisconsin State legislature on July 3, 1849, and the charter also authorized extending the railroad from Janesville, Wisconsin to Fond du Lac. Nevertheless, no railroad tracks were built between Janesville

¹³ Current, 30.

¹⁴ Frederick Merk, *Economic History of Wisconsin During the Civil War*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1916), 277.

¹⁵ Barden, 60.

¹⁶ *Fountain City Herald*, March 7, 1854.

¹⁷ Ruth Shaw Worthing, *The History of Fond du Lac County as Told by its Place-Names*, (Fond du Lac: The Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1976), 81.

and Fond du Lac under this charter.¹⁸ On February 9, 1850 the Wisconsin Legislature changed the name of the Madison and Beloit Railroad to the Rock River Valley Union Railroad, and it was this company that laid the first rails in Fond du Lac.¹⁹

The credit for bringing the first railroad to Fond du Lac belongs to three men: The first, A. Hyatt Smith from Janesville, was the President of the Rock River Valley Union Railroad. The other two were John B. Macy, a real estate promoter, and Timothy L. Gillett, a promoter and future Rock River Valley Union Railroad director. Both Macy and Gillett were Fond du Lac residents.²⁰ Most sources agree that Macy was the most influential figure in bringing the railroad to Fond du Lac, because he was the most vocal of the three. Macy, a real estate promoter, had settled in Fond du Lac in 1845.²¹ After his arrival, the promotion of the city became Macy's main concern. One historian wrote "perhaps no man did so much for Fond du Lac in the way of advertising the location, wealth, health, and future prospects of the place as John B. Macy."²² Macy was a tireless promoter of the Rock River Valley Union Railroad. He believed that, once it was completed, the railroad would mean as much to Wisconsin as the Erie Canal had meant to New York.²³

Timothy Gillett opened up stock subscription books in Fond du Lac on December 19, 1850. He aimed to capitalize the venture by inviting those people who wanted to secure stock in the new company to participate at its outset. Five per cent of the investment was to be paid in advance, and the balance paid in quarterly installments, making stocks accessible to small investors. The majority of this stock was subscribed by local sympathizers in the city and by farmers.

Construction of the Rock River Valley Union line began slowly. Bradley and Company of Burlington, Vermont were given the contract to construct a portion of the railroad. T.F. Strong Sr., a member of the contracting company, went over the route of

¹⁸ W. H. Stennett, *Yesterday and Today, A History of the Chicago and Northwestern Railway System*, (Chicago: Chicago Chapter, Railway and Locomotive Historical Society, 1910), 49.

¹⁹ *First Annual Report of the Railroad Commissioners of the State of Wisconsin*, (Madison: Atwood and Culver, 1874), 282.

²⁰ McKenna, 471.

²¹ *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*, 236.

²² McKenna, 471.

²³ *Fond du Lac Journal*, June 26, 1851.

construction by riding all the way from Chicago to Fond du Lac on horseback. Early in 1851, members of Bradley and Company moved to Fond du Lac with 160 horses, shovels, picks, and wheelbarrows. After seeing the progress of construction on the Rock River Valley Union Railroad, the previously hesitant citizens of Fond du Lac began to regard the idea of the new railroad more positively.²⁴ However, the miserable conditions of the ordinary roads in the area caused delays in construction and contributed to higher costs than had been originally anticipated. One major expense was simply getting the rails to the construction site, because they had to be hauled overland from Green Bay. By 1853, the track had been completed fifteen miles from Fond du Lac towards Chester.²⁵

The railroad's first engine was named the *Winnebago*. It had arrived in 1852, after being transported by boat across Lake Michigan to Sheboygan and then hauled by teams over the plank roads to Fond du Lac. It took workers six weeks to move the fifteen-ton *Winnebago* from Sheboygan to Fond du Lac, with fourteen teams of horses pulling the engine.²⁶

The second engine arrived in 1853 and was named the *Fountain City*. This engine was also brought from Sheboygan to Fond du Lac over plank roads.²⁷ Soon after the arrival of these engines, the Rock River Valley Union Railroad began to conduct business.

The main business of the railroad throughout its period of operation was lumber haulage. Logs from the plentiful forests of the Fox-Wolf basin were floated down the Wolf River, rafted across Lake Winnebago, loaded on rail cars at Fond du Lac, and then carried to Chester. The lumber was then rafted down the Rock River to the lumber mills at Horicon, Watertown, Fort Atkinson, Janesville, and points farther south. Before the Rock River Valley Union came to Fond du Lac, the lumber industry had been limited to supplying only local end users of timber products located in the Fond du Lac area. With

²⁴ McKenna, 185.

²⁵ McKenna, 187.

²⁶ Worthing, 81.

²⁷ McKenna, 187.

the addition of the 15-mile long railroad connecting the Wolf and Fox Rivers to the Rock River System, Fond du Lac's lumber industry became more than just a local operation.²⁸

Paralleling the growth of the railroad, the city of Fond du Lac continued to expand. Between 1851 and 1854 real estate increased in value, property holders became less anxious to sell, business became livelier, and new settlers arrived weekly.²⁹ During the middle of the nineteenth century, Fond du Lac became home to many important industries. Lumbering was increasingly the most important of these. Timber was cut in northern Wisconsin and floated down the rivers and lake to the Fond du Lac city sawmills. Once the lumbering industry became established in Fond du Lac, other related industries followed.³⁰ These included various finished wood product enterprises, including carriage, sash, door, and blind manufacturing. By 1868, the factory of C.J.L. Meyer in Fond du Lac was ranked as the largest sash, door, and blind factory in the world.³¹ Other firms included distilleries, a brewery, a tannery, and soap and candle factories.³² In 1866, Fond du Lac also became the home of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad car works. Annually, 500 to 600 boxcars, flat cars, and coaches were built there.³³ The railroad gave these industries an outlet to distant markets, and the railroad itself became a major industry. Railroads increased land values and led other businesses to move to Fond du Lac in order to obtain the advantages accruing from improved transportation.³⁴

Agriculture in the area had grown significantly during the decade preceding the development of the railroad. Fond du Lac County increased its acreage of farmland from 43,712 acres to 225,299 acres. The value of county farms rose from \$1,249,590 to \$6,803,384, while the value of farming implements and machinery increased from

²⁸ Joseph Schafer, *The Winnebago-Horicon Basin*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1937), 196-197.

²⁹ *Fountain City Herald*, March 14, 1854.

³⁰ Barden, 34.

³¹ Merk, 147.

³² Schafer, 270.

³³ Stuart M. Rich, "Railroad Shops and Car Building in Fond du Lac," *Railroad History*, CXXXV, (1975), 10.

³⁴ William Clark, *Railroads and Rivers, the Story of Inland Transportation*, (L.C. Page and Company, 1930), 158.

\$52,698 to \$268,322.³⁵ The total value of the county's livestock jumped from \$200,945 to \$888,448. In 1850, Fond du Lac was ranked in the second quartile of Wisconsin's thirty-two counties in most categories of agricultural production. Compared to the rest of Wisconsin's fifty-eight counties in 1860, Fond du Lac ranked fourth in improved farmland, fifth in cash value of farms and value of farming implements and machinery and fifth in total value of livestock. Eight years after the Rock River Valley Union Railroad Company began construction, six years after the road reached Chester, and three years after the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad reached Milwaukee, providing Fond du Lac with rail connections to Chicago, the agricultural production of Fond du Lac County had risen from the middle ranks of Wisconsin counties to a position in the top ten per cent.³⁶

Population figures for the city of Fond du Lac also show the impact the railroads had on Fond du Lac. The city's population had more than doubled between 1850 and 1860. The 5,447 people living in Fond du Lac in 1860 made it the sixth largest city in the state, larger than Milwaukee, Racine, Janesville, Madison, and Oshkosh. Yet the railroad had a down side. As early as 1860, Fond du Lac's tax rates, which had risen because of the city's obligation to meet its railroad bond issues, had caused one group of citizens to leave for Colorado, tempted as well by the gold rush of 1858.³⁷

The Rock River Valley Union Railroad soon faced financial difficulties. The railroad was taking in money, but limited supplies and outlets made it impossible to increase its haulage of lumber rapidly enough to cover costs, including debt services.³⁸ In order to solve this problem, the railroad line needed to expand. The *First Annual Report of the Wisconsin Railway Commissioners* stated that "the Rock River Valley Union Railroad Company of Wisconsin have become seriously embarrassed in their affairs and are unable to pay their present current liabilities on the interest coupons upon their mortgage bonds, many of which have matured and are now past due." To help bring the railroad out of its financial difficulties, the Fond du Lac company applied for assistance

³⁵ Joseph Kennedy, *Agriculture of the United States in 1860, 8th Census*, (Washington, Government Printing Office, 1864), 3-13.

³⁶ Kennedy, 167-168.

³⁷ Schafer, 272.

³⁸ *Fond du Lac Union*, August, 23, 1855.

from the Wisconsin legislature in 1855, only four years after initial construction began. The railroad stated that it needed a law authorizing it to consolidate with the Illinois and Wisconsin Railroad Company in order to survive.³⁹ On March 10, 1855, the legislature approved the request for consolidation. The two lines merged under the name of the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad Company on March 31, 1855. To aid in this consolidation, the city of Fond du Lac voted to issue \$350,000 in bonds. These bonds were needed to finance upgrading of facilities, because the railroad did not meet the standard advertised by its promoters, largely because the rails used for initial construction had been mainly strap iron rails on wooden cross-ties. Indeed, the cars were sometimes even operated on wooden rail sleepers used instead of iron rails, because of the lack of funds to buy the more expensive metal rails.⁴⁰

The objective of the new company was stated in an early report given by the directors. Their goal for the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad Company was to extend the line from Janesville northwestward through Madison and LaCrosse to St. Paul, from Janesville northward along the valley of the Rock River to Fond du Lac and northward to the great iron and copper regions of Lake Superior.⁴¹ In trying to reach its goal, the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad Company also consolidated with the Wisconsin and Superior Railroad Company, the Ontonagon and State Line Railroad Company, and the Marquette and State Line Railroad Company. These consolidations all took place in March 1857.⁴²

In its early operations, the Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac Railroad Company experienced success. In 1855, the line was extended from Cary, Illinois to Janesville, Wisconsin, a distance of approximately fifty miles. This gave businesses in Janesville a route into Chicago. By February 1856, the Fond du Lac line had been extended from Fond du Lac southward to Minnesota Junction, where connections could be made to Milwaukee.⁴³

³⁹ Stennett, 54.

⁴⁰ McKenna, 187.

⁴¹ Stennett, 54.

⁴² *The First Annual Report of the Wisconsin Railway Commissioners*, 127.

⁴³ Robert Casey, *Pioneer Railroad*, (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1948), 79.

The editor of the *Fond du Lac Union*, M. J. Thomas, wrote enthusiastically that “the beneficial effects of this connection upon the growth, prosperity and business interests of our city cannot be over estimated nor will be fully realized until the tide of emigration, which invariably flows through these iron channels, shall have fairly set in upon us during the coming season.”⁴⁴ Thomas believed that, with Fond du Lac tied by rail to Chicago and Green Bay through the new connections, a larger market would increase the economic benefits to the growing city of Fond du Lac.⁴⁵ He reasoned that the lumber business and other businesses would continue to follow a route from Fond du Lac to southern Wisconsin and northern Illinois. He calculated that it would be cheaper for farmers north of Janesville to transport their grain to Buffalo by way of Fond du Lac and Green Bay. The Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac Railroad would haul logs southward and grain northward, with Fond du Lac in the middle of both of the business exchanges. Unfortunately, the short-term outcome for the railroad was quite different from Thomas’ rosy projections.

Economic growth at this time simply did not move fast enough to help save the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad from bankruptcy. The railroad began to struggle, due to lack of funds, workers, and supplies.⁴⁶ Just when finances were beginning to look positive for the railroad, the Panic of 1857 occurred. Because of this depression, for two to three years coin and banknotes both became very scarce, a condition described at the time as a “money famine.” Merchants and manufacturers had to use a barter system in order to stay in business. The owner of a sash and door business, for example might exchange his products for hay, ham, town lots, horses, and cows.

The depression also set back industrial development in Wisconsin. Large-scale manufacturing companies with reserve funds were able to stay in business, but they were not able to expand. Small businesses, with only a minimal amount of money invested and with little or no machinery, were often forced out of business. Overall, medium-sized industries, with thousands of dollars invested, were hit the hardest.

⁴⁴ *The Fond du Lac Union*, February 21, 1856.

⁴⁵ *The Fond du Lac Union*, February 1, 1856.

⁴⁶ Casey, 77, 79-80.

Lumber and flour milling plants were the two main industrial concerns in Fond du Lac at the time of the 1857 panic. Both these industries relied heavily on the railroads for haulage. Railroad rate policy also caused problems for industries during the panic. Hitherto, farmers had been supporters of the railroads, because of their expectation that railroads would help to lower the cost of marketing crops. When the depression occurred, the railroads reduced their prices in areas of the state where competing lines existed, but they made up for these price reductions by means of raising prices in areas where competing lines were not a factor.

Despite their efforts to profit at the expense of farmers and other shippers, no Wisconsin enterprise suffered more from the depression than did the railroads. One railroad after another went bankrupt. The bankrupt railroads were then controlled by receiverships. In turn, the railroad bankruptcies threatened the future of thousands of farmers, because these farmers had helped to build the railroads by mortgaging their farms in order to purchase railroad stock both as an investment and to support railroad construction. Farmers had expected to gain a profit from their shares of stock, over and above the amount they needed to cover the interest due on their mortgages. The mortgages were now in the hands of the railroad bondholders, and if the bondholders foreclosed, the mortgages would have to be repaid, or the farmers would lose their land. Farmers who had viewed railroads as their best friend now saw them as their worst enemy.⁴⁷

Among the railroads that suffered from the panic, the Chicago, St. Paul, and Fond du Lac Railroad Company defaulted on interest payments on its bonds and was forced to file a bankruptcy petition.⁴⁸ In February 1859, the Illinois state legislature authorized sale and reorganization of the company. The reorganized line was sold at Janesville on June 2, 1859, for \$10,849,938.⁴⁹ A new company was established, named the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, on June 6, 1859.⁵⁰ The President of this new railroad was William Butler Ogden. Ogden, the first mayor of Chicago and a railroad promoter,

⁴⁷ Current, 237-244.

⁴⁸ Casey, 77, 79-80.

⁴⁹ Stennett, 37.

⁵⁰ *The First Annual Report of the Wisconsin Railway Commissioners*, 285.

wanted control of the Fond du Lac rails, because he considered them “one of the foundation stones that would turn his dreams of a great northwestern railway system into a reality.”⁵¹ That same year, the Chicago and Northwestern completed a line from Oshkosh to Chicago through Fond du Lac and Janesville, a distance of 194 miles.⁵²

But the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company experienced financial problems in its turn. In April 1861, the railroad’s bondholders held a meeting in New York City. A committee was appointed to determine the best way out of the firm’s financial embarrassments. Expansion was seen as a necessity for the development of the system, but the committee did not recommend expansion from Appleton to Green Bay and from Neenah to Waupaca. Ogden, who disagreed with the committee, went directly to the people of Brown County and offered \$49,500 worth of Chicago and Northwestern stock to them in return for financial help in expanding the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad route to Green Bay. His motto for this campaign was “faith in the future.” The Wisconsin state legislature then authorized the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad to locate a line by way of Green Bay to the Menominee River. Construction was completed as far as Green Bay in the fall of 1862.⁵³

Despite the economic woes of the Panic of 1857, according to the census of 1860, Fond du Lac and Fond du Lac County had continued to grow dramatically. During the 1860s, as railroad construction was put on hold because of the lack of resources, building railway cars became a priority in the industry, partly due to the transport requirements of Civil War armies. Fond du Lac became a prime location for such construction because of its abundant lumber, skilled workforce, and its a central location at a point where several railroads met.⁵⁴ The Chicago and Northwestern car shop, located in Fond du Lac, initially consisted of a blacksmith’s shop and a carpenter’s shop. The car shop was situated on the west bank of the Fond du Lac River. By 1866, the car shop had expanded to become a major facility, producing four railroad cars a day. In 1866, it employed from 250 to 300 men continuously. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad also owned and

⁵¹ Casey, 76.

⁵² Stennett, 38.

⁵³ Casey, 81.

⁵⁴ Rich, 9-10.

operated a sawmill at the shop to provide lumber for cars.⁵⁵ These facilities were known as the “Van Brunt” works. Both passenger and freight cars were built at the “Van Brunt” factory, including some sleeping and drawing room cars, which were claimed to be “without exception the finest cars ever made in western states.” Not only was the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad Company providing transportation, it was also one of the largest employers in the Fond du Lac area between 1851 and 1876.⁵⁶

In 1870, Fond du Lac County boasted an estimated 46,273 citizens. The city of Fond du Lac had a population of 12,764, which ranked it second among Wisconsin cities, smaller only than Milwaukee. Fond du Lac County ranked fourth in population among Wisconsin’s fifty-eight counties.⁵⁷ The county’s 300 manufacturers ranked third in total employment, capital invested, money spent on materials, and the value of their products. Most of these principal manufacturers were located in the city of Fond du Lac.⁵⁸ Wood products and lumber businesses remained the major industries, both supported by the Chicago and Northwestern Railway Company.⁵⁹

The Chicago and Northwestern remained Fond du Lac’s sole railroad until 1869, when the Sheboygan and Fond du Lac Railroad began to operate between those two cities. In 1873, the two railways were joined by the Northwestern Union, known as the “Air Line” to Milwaukee. The following year, the Fond du Lac, Amboy, and Peoria Railroad was chartered, with construction beginning in 1875. For years, railroad construction remained a huge factor in the growth of Fond du Lac.⁶⁰

In 1873, the Chicago and Northwestern’s car shops employed over 400 men.⁶¹ Fond du Lac’s eighteen lumber and shingle mills also continued to flourish, and they created 830 jobs for Fond du Lac County residents. By 1875 the population of the city of Fond du Lac had grown to 15,308. Local industrialists, businessmen, and farmers continued to be the beneficiaries of the economic gains which had been fairly constant

⁵⁵ *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, November 14, 1866.

⁵⁶ Rich, 9-11.

⁵⁷ Francis Walker, *The Ninth Census, A Compendium*, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1872), 104.

⁵⁸ Walker, 792-793, 840.

⁵⁹ Schafer, 274.

⁶⁰ Rich, 6.

⁶¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, February 14, 1873.

since the coming of the Rock River Valley Union Railroad to Fond du Lac in 1851.⁶²

However, Wisconsin's "Second City" was about to enter a severe economic downturn, the depression of 1873, which slowed growth for more than twenty years.⁶³ Other reasons made this shift in the city's economic fortunes a lasting one. Even though Fond du Lac businesses still flourished in the early 1870s, they were no longer growing steadily. There were several reasons for this stagnation. The Chicago and Northwestern Railroad pushed northward, closer to the remaining sources of timber. The railroad reached Oshkosh in 1851, Appleton in 1861, and the Green Bay in 1862. Fond du Lac's unique position as the terminus for a railway line tapping a vast timber resource disappeared as Wisconsin railroad development continued northward.⁶⁴

Fond du Lac had also lost some of the important men who had helped make the city prosperous. John B. Macy, the man who helped secure the railroad for Fond du Lac, died in a boating accident in Sheboygan in 1855.⁶⁵ Timothy Gillett was tragically killed in a Northwestern train wreck October 12, 1859. That day was supposed to be a day of celebration, but ended in sorrow. People from Chicago, Janesville, and Watertown were visiting Fond du Lac to celebrate the completion of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad line from Chicago to Fond du Lac. As the train returned southward down the Chicago and Northwestern line, eight miles outside Watertown, a grazing ox wandered onto the tracks. The train, traveling at ten miles an hour, hit the ox, which then became wedged under the engine's cowcatcher. This mishap threw the engine and its five cars, carrying two hundred passengers, off the tracks. Fourteen people perished in this accident, and Gillett was one these.⁶⁶ In 1866, death also claimed Mason C. Darling, physician, land speculator, politician, Congressman, and member of the Board of Directors of the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad.⁶⁷ All three of these men had been progressive forces in Fond du Lac, and their absence was felt through a decline in the vision of the new city leadership.

⁶² McKenna, 328-329.

⁶³ Current, 452.

⁶⁴ McKenna, 328.

⁶⁵ *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*, 236.

⁶⁶ McKenna, 190.

⁶⁷ *Dictionary of Wisconsin Biography*, 95.

Certain Fond du Lac investors who had been important to its growth also left to speculate in the oil business in Kentucky and in Colorado, removing money and energy that otherwise might have been used to develop Fond du Lac's economy. But perhaps the major reason for Fond du Lac's decline in the 1870s was the rise of its northern neighbor, Oshkosh.⁶⁸ According to the 1870 census, Oshkosh already outstripped Fond du Lac as a lumber and shingle producer. Between 1870 and 1880, the population of Oshkosh increased by nearly forty per cent, whereas from 1875 to 1880 the population of Fond du Lac declined from 15,308 to 13,091 citizens.⁶⁹

Part of Fond du Lac's population decline can be traced to the withdrawal of the Chicago and Northwestern car shops from the city in 1876. In the early 1870s, the Chicago and Northwestern had purchased 240 acres outside Chicago, planning to consolidate its car building facilities on this particular site due to financial reasons. Despite efforts by Fond du Lac officials who had hoped to keep the shops in Fond du Lac, on July 6, 1876, the whistle at the Chicago and Northwestern Fond du Lac car shops blew for the last time, bringing to a close twenty-five years of continuous constructive activity.⁷⁰ When the Chicago and Northwestern car shops were removed, the lumber industry in Fond du Lac also began to decline. The lumber industry had been sustained partly because of the railroad industry, and its decline can be traced directly to the loss of the car shops. Fond du Lac's economic revival in the 1890s only occurred after the Wisconsin Central Railroad Company and the Chicago and Northwestern relocated railway car shops once again in North Fond du Lac.⁷¹

Railroads in Fond du Lac encountered many difficulties during the period 1851-1876. Delays in construction, negativity from some local people, limited facilities, consolidation, financial crises, and reorganization all complicated the process of railroad construction and operation. Paradoxically, at the same time that individual railroads were struggling, they triggered an economic boom in Fond du Lac. By 1853 the Rock River Valley Union Railroad was hauling lumber to Chester. In 1856 the Chicago, St. Paul, and

⁶⁸ Schafer, 279-280.

⁶⁹ McKenna, 329.

⁷⁰ Rich, 13.

⁷¹ McKenna, 329.

Chicago and North Western Directors' Private Railcar (late 1800s)

Fond du Lac created an outlet from Fond du Lac to Milwaukee. By 1859 the Chicago and Northwestern had completed a line from Fond du Lac to Janesville, Chicago, and the world. The overall result of all these achievements was the tremendous physical and economic growth of the city of Fond du Lac.⁷²

The railroads played a decisive role in shaping and molding Fond du Lac during its early years. Without the Rock River Valley Union Railroad, the Chicago, St. Paul and Fond du Lac, and the Chicago and Northwestern, Fond du Lac's economic growth between 1851 and 1876 could not have occurred.

⁷² Casey and Douglas, 79-80.

The Great Depression Strikes Fond du Lac, 1929-1935

Nicole Jones

The Great Depression was a very difficult time in America. It marked a time of economic decay and poverty for many Americans. Life during the Great Depression was a great struggle for many. It was sometimes hard to find food, much less a job. Businesses, if they stayed open, were forced to slow their production and people were laid off. One local Fond du Lac woman recalled, “My father worked at Rueping’s. Every morning he left for work at 7 A.M. and was usually home by 10 A.M., He never knew how many hours a day he would work.... About half of the city’s families were on some [form of] relief, to help them through the times.”¹ By 1933, about one-fourth of the country was out of work. That meant that approximately 14 million people were unemployed. In total, 40 million people, including family members, were without a dependable income in 1933.² Many people around the country were in need of help. In Wisconsin, large numbers of people were unemployed. In 1930 97,000 people were without work; in 1931 the number increased to 196,000; in 1932 269,000 people were unemployed; and only in 1933 did the number dip slightly to 239,000.³

What the Great Depression meant to communities becomes even more vivid when it is examined on a local scale. Both the problems faced and the ways communities coped with the economic crisis of the Great Depression come to life. In Fond du Lac, the Great Depression weakened local banks, stimulated the establishment of local relief and aid programs, and brought nagging problems in agriculture to a head. The election of 1932 dramatically changed local politics as Fond du Lac responded to the Depression like many other communities in Wisconsin.

Although the financial panic is often seen as triggering economic collapse, the Great Depression did not start on October 29, 1929 when the New York Stock Market crashed. Instead, the crash was a culmination of many developments. Speculative stock

¹ Fond du Lac: “150 Years: 1836-1986 Sesquicentennial Historical Commemorative Booklet,” 1986. Fond du Lac County Historical Society.

² Robert S. McElvaine, *Down & Out in the Great Depression: Letters from the Forgotten Man*. (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1983), 7.

³ The Committee on Economic Security, *Social Security in America*, Social Security Board. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.ssa.gov/history/reports/ces/cesbook.html>, 1937.

purchasing, the economic effects of World War I, and an enduring series of problems with agriculture in the United States led to the stock market crash. Yet the crisis was a watershed that marked change for a whole nation.

The New York Stock Market was a pillar of American business ideals. America was devoted to building fast and making money. America's industry was booming, and money was becoming more abundant. Buying stock was a popular trend for people who saw the bull market as risk-free. Unfortunately, some bought stock with little of their own money, a procedure called margin buying in which purchasers borrowed up to 75% of the price of a stock. The stock market was seen as a way for people to make quick money. The borrowed money was largely from banks. When the market crashed, stocks went from "\$87 billion (at least on paper) to \$55 billion" in a matter of days, and many stockholders who suffered a great loss could not sell their shares. Consequently, they could not afford to pay back their loans to the banks.⁴ The banks in turn lost their money and could not recover from such large losses. Since banks had no way to insure their deposits, many people lost their life savings when the financial institutions collapsed.

President Herbert Hoover explained that the crash had been caused by "our immediate weak spot was the orgy of stock speculation which began to slump in October, 1929."⁵ Hoover's statement about the cause of the Great Depression resting with speculation has been challenged subsequently by scholars, who now generally agree that American stock prices were not unreasonably high in 1929 and that the October collapse had little or no effect on the level of industrial activity in the United States or anywhere else.⁶ This means that the stock market crash itself did not have a direct effect on American industry. Yet people still lost their jobs.

President Hoover also offered another, more credible, explanation for the Great Depression and the stock market crash. He asserted that it was a worldwide problem that stemmed from the Great War of 1914-1918. "In four-fifths of the 'economically sensitive' nations of the world, including such remote areas as Bolivia, Bulgaria, and

⁴ David Brody, Lynn Dumenil, and James A. Henretta, *America: A Concise History v. 2, Since 1865* (Boston: Massachusetts: Bedford/ St. Martin's, 1999), 667.

⁵ John Garraty, "President Hoover's Efforts" in Edward Robb Ellis, ed., *The Great Depression: A Historical Reader* (New York: Houghton Mifflin Company, 2000), 64.

⁶ Garraty, 65.

Australia, economic downturn was noticeable long before the 1929 collapse of American stock prices.”⁷ In essence, World War I had created worldwide debt that put a strain on the world economy. Countries were trying to pay off their war debts and could not stimulate world economies, including that of the United States. The crash was thus a culmination of an ongoing problem.

While he might be able to analyze the causes, President Herbert Hoover offered few ways to bring about a rebound from the Great Depression. He favored the traditional approach of balanced budgets, high tariffs to protect domestic production, tight money, governmental economy, and a reminder to the people that they themselves should find a way to recover.

Victory over this depression and over our other difficulties will be won by the resolution of our people to fight their own battles in their own communities, by stimulating their ingenuity to solve their own problems, by taking new courage to be masters of their own destiny in the struggle of life. This is not the easy way, but it is the American way.⁸

This solution did not meet with a lot of support. People who were in need of assistance had no way to improve themselves. Had they a way to live and contribute to society, they would not have needed relief. Farmers in particular were really suffering, and discipline and self-help seemed to be inadequate solutions.

A weakened agricultural sector of the economy was a major contributor to the Great Depression. American agriculture suffered a recession in 1920 and 1921 when wartime conditions ended. Farmers were not able to rebound from their loss of income at this time, and agriculture remained in the doldrums in much of the world for the whole ensuing decade. The pinch was doubly difficult, because the price of machinery remained high, and many farmers could not afford to modernize production. The resulting inefficiency of production harmed smaller farmers. Many farmers also had mortgages on their farms, sometimes due to expansion during the better times of the war, and corrowing based on expected sale of a crop was standard practice. When prices of commodities remained low, farmers could not pay the banks from which they had borrowed to buy

⁷ Garraty, 63.

⁸ David Donald, *Depression, Recovery, and War: 1929-1945* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1966), 17.

their farms and plant their crops. This put added stress on banks, for there was less and less money coming into them.⁹ Farmers could not pay the banks money that was not being “grown.” The farm crisis had a direct effect on the stability of banks in the 1929 crisis, for the banks simply could not survive the additional rapid blow of the stock market crash on top of the ongoing stress of the agricultural crisis.

The Stock Market crash of 1929 and the recession in agriculture financially affected banks in Fond du Lac. When the New York Stock Market crashed on October 29, 1929, The Fond du Lac Daily Reporter stated, “prices seemed to have no bottom” that day on the market. “Although trading proceeded more swiftly than ever, the scene on the floor of the stock exchange was no more confused than it has been on many other days, according to veteran traders.”¹⁰

In 1928, there were five banks in Fond du Lac: First-Fond du Lac National Bank, Cole Savings Bank, The Citizens State Bank, Commercial National Bank, and The First Wisconsin Bank.¹¹ The First Fond du Lac National Bank was formed in 1918 when the First National Bank and Fond du Lac National Bank consolidated. It advertised that it had served Fond du Lac with 77 years of safe banking in the 1932 Fond du Lac City Directory. The bank enjoyed stable leadership; Ernest J. Perry was President of the bank from 1915 until 1948.¹² This bank survived the Great Depression and returned to its original name of First National Bank in 1955.

The Cole Savings Bank emphasized its place as a locally-based institution. In 1928, the bank placed an advertisement in the City Directory stating “Keep your money working in this community-whether you spend, invest or bank it. Then you will share in the benefits it brings.” William E. Cole had opened Cole Savings Bank in Fond du Lac in 1879. According to the October 29, 1929 story in The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter, “From a small organization in the days after the Civil War, the bank has grown to be one of the largest of its kind in this section in the country.”¹³

⁹ David Brody, Lynn Dumenil, and James A. Henretta, 668.

¹⁰ “Stock Exchange Drops,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 29, 1929.

¹¹ *Fond du Lac City Directory*. 1928.

¹² Fond du Lac Historical Society. Banks folder.

¹³ “Cole Savings Bank occupies Front Rank In Financial Institutions of Middle West; Was opened In 1879 by William E. Cole,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 14, 1924.

The Cole Savings Bank expanded in 1924 by building a new bank building, complete with a grand and ornate lobby trimmed with Grecian and Italian marble. While the bank appeared to be doing very well at the time, it may be that the money the bank spent on expansion was a mistake and helped bring about its demise, for the bank failed in 1929.¹⁴

The Bank of Fond du Lac was established in the same location that the Cole Savings Bank had occupied. The bank continued business with the depositors of the closed Cole Savings Bank, which had held deposits of \$758,000 at the time it closed.¹⁵ George F. Reuz of Milwaukee became the President of the new bank. Reuz was able to pay all Cole Bank depositors in full.¹⁶ But the Bank of Fond du Lac failed in its turn in 1932. It was unfortunately unable to recover from the closing of Cole Savings Bank.¹⁷ It is unclear whether depositors recovered their money from this second closing.

Other Fond du Lac banks opened during the early years of the 20th century. The Citizens State Bank opened in 1911. Located at 104 South Main Street, the President at the time of its founding was E.A. Curtis. The Citizen's State Bank, whose President at that time was A.J. Pullen, advertised in the 1928 Fond du Lac City Directory that its resources were \$1,000,000, and the Commercial National Bank, whose President was H.R. Potter, advertised the same publication that its capital and surplus amounted to \$710,000. In 1932 the Citizens State Bank consolidated with Commercial National Bank, suggesting that one or both of the institutions was experiencing difficulties, for in March 1933, Commercial National Bank failed to reopen after the bank holiday, and it was forced to liquidate.

The Bank Holiday of 1933 was a 14-day cessation of operation of banks nationwide. The temporary closure was intended to prevent a run on banks. Lieutenant Governor Thomas J. O'Malley proclaimed on March 3, 1933 that a banking holiday was needed to sort out the bank crisis in Wisconsin. The holiday proclamation took effect at

¹⁴ Fond du Lac County Historical Society. Banks Folder.

¹⁵ "All Depositors of Closed Bank Are Fully Paid," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 3, 1931.

¹⁶ Fond du Lac County Historical Society. "History of the First Wisconsin National Bank of Fond du Lac and Banking in Fond du Lac," typescript dated July 1967. Banks folder.

¹⁷ Fond du Lac Historical Society. Banks Folder.

once and provided that no business was allowed to transact business up to midnight on Thursday, March 16. Lieutenant Governor O'Malley acted upon the advice of the state banking review board and with the approval of Governor A. G. Schmedeman who was in conference with Federal authorities in Washington.¹⁸

An editorial in The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter attempted to make the best of the situation.

Throughout the country today the bank holiday, despite the inconveniences and temporary handicaps it may cause, is cheerfully, willingly and gladly accepted. It is recognized as the first step or application of a remedy that will mean safe banking. It is bound to bring about the readjustment that will make for recovery and stability of the entire national economic structure.¹⁹

The goal, of course, was to lessen panic among Fond du Lac citizens when all their banks suddenly closed.

Many banks disobeyed the proclamation and stayed open. "In Milwaukee and other cities patrons were allowed access to safety deposit vaults, and much currency that had been hoarded in the expectation of just such an emergency was coming into circulation."²⁰ Banks in Fond du Lac did remain closed for the most part, although they did make their vaults available to merchants who wanted to put their receipts into the safe. There was also a large increase in night depository bags requested by merchants to put money into the banks. A large increase in the sale and cashing of money orders was reported by American Express and the Post Office in Fond du Lac, as people tried to maneuver around the restrictions.²¹

During this bank holiday, bank supervisory authorities reviewed the conditions of the banks in Fond du Lac. Each bank was placed in a category. Some banks were allowed to open on an unrestricted basis. Other banks reopened with restricted deposits and withdrawals. The third category was banks that had to close and liquidate. In Fond du Lac, only the First Fond du Lac National Bank was authorized to reopen on an

¹⁸ "14-Day Cessation Of Operation is Ordered By Official Proclamation," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 3, 1933.

¹⁹ "Roosevelt Acts," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 7, 1933.

²⁰ "14-Day Cessation Of Operation is Ordered By Official Proclamation," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 3, 1933.

²¹ "Banks Offer Safety Facilities To Customers; Post Office Cashes All Orders," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 4, 1933.

unrestricted basis. It operated as the sole banking institution in the city from March to December 1933, when the National Exchange Bank was organized.²² The reopened banks tried to strengthen their consumer confidence by emphasizing their financial worth. The First Fond du Lac National Bank advertised in the 1934 Fond du Lac City Directory that their capital was worth \$500,000, their surplus worth \$350,000, their profits and reserves \$99,000, and their resources \$6,696,000. The newly opened National Exchange Bank advertised in the 1934 Fond du Lac City Directory that its capital and surplus was \$500,000. When president of the bank William Mauthe opened the doors of the new institution, a condition that had existed for nearly a year came to an end: For nine months the citizens of Fond du Lac only had had one bank available to them locally, The First Fond du Lac Bank. Its major competition, the Commercial National Bank, had consolidated with Citizens State Bank in 1932. This consolidated bank, known as the Commercial State Bank fell into the category of banks that were forced to close. Banking in Fond du Lac was little short of chaotic during this time.

Many local businesses needed to pay their employees but lacked the cash to do so. The Fred Rueping Leather Company was forced to import money from Chicago to pay its employees for two weeks of labor. Approximately \$17,500 in cash was procured from Chicago banks. F. J. Rueping and other company officials had the money expressed to Fond du Lac. Fearing that the presence of large sums in such unsettled times could tempt thieves, Rueping said that it would be “useless for safe blowers or hold-up men to visit the plant offices, as the money is safely stored outside the plant and office.”²³ Employees of other businesses were given paychecks at a time when the banks were not open and they could not cash them, producing much anxiety among the recipients. Cash was in demand and was in short supply; few stores could cash large checks. Yet, workers had to buy food and pay rent. Many couldn’t meet their needs without currency.

Some local businesses that were strapped for cash because of the bank holiday found imaginative solutions to the problem. Employees of Sanitary Refrigerator, of Northern Casket, and of Demountable Typewriter were issued paychecks as usual. The

²² History of the First Wisconsin National Bank of Fond du Lac and Banking in Fond du Lac.

²³ “Tannery To Pay Employees with ‘Imported’ Cash,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 4, 1933.

president of those three companies assured workers that the money was good behind the checks. He worked with the Emergency Finance Corporation to assure that those checks could be converted into a new issue of emergency corporation trade certificates. Each pay check was to be accompanied by a slip advising the employee receiving it that he could secure the emergency currency “dollar for dollar” and that the currency would be protected by securities deposited with the finance corporation by the manufacturing companies, according to William Mauthe, President of the National Exchange Bank.²⁴

By 1934 only three banks were operating in Fond du Lac, the First Fond du Lac National Bank, First Wisconsin Bank, and the newly founded National Exchange Bank. The only two banks that survived the early days of the depression were the First Fond du Lac National Bank and the First Wisconsin Bank.²⁵ Local banking was clearly in crisis. Banks consolidated with other banks to try to become more stable yet still failed. The Cole Savings Bank had been an established bank in Fond du Lac for nearly fifty years, and yet it had to close. Banks didn’t seem so trustworthy after all, despite their marble lobbies.

Increased economic relief for unemployed workers was a major development in Fond du Lac as a result of the Great Depression. Many people were out of work and could not afford to live. Government and local charities sought to provide relief for such people in need of food and housing. Efforts to help those in need began before Franklin D. Roosevelt was elected and implemented his New Deal.

The Fond du Lac Transient Relief Depot was opened in the old Glasow-Tubbs Company warehouse on Forest Avenue in November 1931. Within the first six days of its opening, the depot served 680 meals, and there wasn’t enough room to house those who needed a place to sleep. About 200 men resided there, with a limit to their stay of one day at a time, unless they helped out at the depot. The limit was a mechanism to encourage transients to leave town quickly.

A good portion of the food handed out at the depot was donated by local farmers, butchers, bakers, and other donors. The average cost of a meal was five cents. Donations

²⁴ “Tannery To Pay Employees with ‘Imported’ Cash,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, March 4, 1933.

²⁵ *Fond du Lac City Directory*, 1934.

of cots and blankets were received from Camp Douglass.²⁶ By November 30, 3,040 meals had been distributed at the depot. According to Reverend E. R. MacKinney, who organized the effort, the depot was designed to get men off the street and to reduce the number of beggars.²⁷ The citizens of Fond du Lac evidently wanted to keep wanderers off the streets and also to encourage outsiders to move on.

Gardens also became a way for families to supplement inadequate incomes. Sydney S. Miller, the secretary of the City Welfare Association, said that the “garden for every family” campaign was a success. Each family that received aid planted a garden to supply their family with fresh vegetables. About twenty vacant lots were made available for families to use. *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* publicized the existence of the lots. One strip of garden land, owned by the Wisconsin Power and Light Company, was located on Sixteenth Street. About thirty-five families used that plot of land for their gardens. Families who were on relief and did not plant a garden were not able to collect their aid. This was seen as another way to keep families on aid accountable.²⁸

Echoing President Herbert Hoover, the concept that those receiving charity were loafers was frequently evident, even in the face of mass unemployment. Fond du Lac Mayor Albert J. Rosenthal stated that he would make sure families were held accountable if they were receiving relief. “No work, no food” was his watchword. He claimed his intentions were not harsh, but he wanted to reinforce a “give and take” rule. According to Rosenthal, this measure “will bring vigorous objection from the habitual incompetent or agitator who has been taking advantage of unemployment conditions to realize his long cherished ambition of enjoying food, shelter and clothing without the slightest effort on his own part.”²⁹

Mayor Rosenthal obviously did not realize that many who were on aid were unable to support themselves. Jobs were not easy to come by. Even if one could find a

²⁶ “Transients Visiting City Relief Depot Choose Floor As Beds; Cots Are Awaited,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 12, 1931.

²⁷ “Relief Depot Aids 1,113 Men First 25 Days,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, December 2, 1931.

²⁸ “Garden for Every Family Effort Called Success As Aid Recipients Plant Seeds,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 25, 1932.

²⁹ “Proper Course,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 28, 1933.

job, many of these positions were temporary and connected to a certain project. A steady income was hard to come by, and there were few permanent jobs available. Were there really so many incompetents and agitators in Fond du Lac in 1933, long hoping to be able to take advantage of economic hardship to gain access to charity, as was suggested by Mayor Rosenthal's comment?

Other forms of relief came from the Federal government. The Wisconsin Association of Public Relief Officials administered a Federal fund for relief to Fond du Lac. One Fond du Lac City relief worker, J. C. Viets, stated that all such funds had to be distributed through public relief agencies. Viets also said that all relief work had to be done on state or local projects, that is, public works. The money given to the agencies by the government could be used for food, shelter, light, gas, fuel, water, household needs, clothes, and medical supplies for those receiving aid.³⁰

Assistance was also provided by private organizations in the city. For example, the *Annals* of the Congregation of Saint Agnes records that in the month of August 1931, 1250 meals were given to the hungry at the hospital and about 400 meals were served at the convent.³¹

Local projects created jobs for the unemployed in Fond du Lac. A mile-long pipeline needed to be built to connect the Bischoff Street well to the West Rees Street reservoir. It was estimated that the completion of the construction would require 12,000 man-hours. This equated to only about one and a half months' time. Only unemployed men were eligible for these jobs. The intent was to take men off the streets and put money in their pockets, at least temporarily. E. J. Braun of the Water Department estimated it would require 25 men to carry out the project.³² Thus the city created some jobs for the unemployed, while helping the welfare of the whole community.

Other types of relief were also implemented in Fond du Lac after Franklin D. Roosevelt introduced the New Deal in 1933. "The federal government poured millions of dollars into construction projects, including the March 16, 1934 construction of a Fond du

³⁰ "Federal Fund for Relief is Assured City," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 28, 1932.

³¹ Sister Margaret Lorimer, CSA, historian of the Congregation, notes that this is the only reference to such charity in the archives of the Agnesians, but meals were regularly given by the Sisters to those who asked, at through the 1940s. Unpublished manuscript history of the Congregation of Saint Agnes.

³² "City Project Gives 12,000 Labor Hours," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, August 5, 1932.

Lac County poorhouse. The project was initiated by the Wisconsin Civil Works Administration.”³³

Agricultural relief was also given to the state by the Federal government. Designed to stop overproduction, the Agricultural Adjustment Act (AAA) was created during the first hundred days that Franklin D. Roosevelt was in office. The Agricultural Adjustment Administration was created to disperse relief money to farmers who were willing to cut production.³⁴ In 1935, Wisconsin received \$8,970,225.61 in AAA benefits. Fond du Lac County was given \$213,991 in aid for sugar beet benefits. Other benefits were received for wheat, tobacco, sugar, and corn-hogs.³⁵ The Agricultural Adjustment Act set up an allotment system for major commodities though providing cash subsidies for farmers who reduced production. New Deal planners thought prices would rise in response to federally induced scarcity, and they hoped this would stimulate broader recovery.³⁶ Agricultural overproduction seemed to be a major problem. President Franklin D. Roosevelt understood that farmers needed an incentive to prevent a flooding of the market that would cause commodity prices to collapse. Reduced production would bring better prices for commodities. Unfortunately, this approach also destroyed food that hungry people desperately needed.

Agriculture was a major part of Wisconsin’s livelihood. The state’s dairy farmers had been frustrated for years by falling prices. The response was to produce more in order to make the same amount of income they made previously, and that in turn pushed prices further downward. This “scissors” crisis hit the industry hard. There were two prices set for milk at the time, one price for fluid milk and one for milk that was to be made into butter, cheese, and other dairy products with a longer shelf life. Fluid milk brought a higher price than milk for other products, largely because fluid milk spoiled more easily on the way to market, and because it cost more to cool that milk in order to

³³ Dick Snow, “A History of Construction.” *The Daily Reporter*. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.dailyreporter.com/special/history/thirties.html>, 2001.

³⁴ Stanley K. Schultz, & William P. Tishler, “The Great Depression and the New Deal.” In *American History 102: Civil War to the Present* [online]. Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin, 1999. Available from World Wide Web: <http://www.us.history.wisc.edu/hist102/lectures/lecture19.html>.

³⁵ “County Leads in AAA Crop Award,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 26, 1935.

³⁶ Brody, Dumenil, & Henretta, 697. The commodities included wheat, cotton, corn, hogs, rice, tobacco, and dairy products.

get it to the marketplace. The price differential started to squeeze consumers and they cut back on purchases of fluid milk. Larger dairies were able to control the market price of milk, because it was easier for them to produce mass quantities of milk. Smaller farms could not do this, and this set the stage for strife among dairy farmers.³⁷

The Wisconsin milk strikes started in 1933. The small farmers were sick of dictation by the large producers who controlled the market. These farmers formed a group called the Singler's Milk Pool. They wanted farmers to withhold their product until a fair price for milk was met. Those who tried to get their milk to market had to confront members of the group. Strikers from the Milk Pool dumped shipments of milk on the side of the road and harassed farmers who were trying to sell their milk.³⁸

By February 1933, farmers were picketing in Fond du Lac County and there were local reports of milk dumping. Large producers of milk in the county were warned by the protesters that their milk shipments would be dumped unless they paid farmers \$1.40 per 100 pounds of milk.³⁹ Often such actions were farcical. Picketers in Dotyville stopped one milk truck but only made faces at the driver, perhaps because a sheriff's deputy was riding in the truck. The deputy warned the picketers that they would have to pay for any damage they did. There were bad feelings in the community against the milk strikers.

An even larger group, the Wisconsin Farm Holiday Farmers, joined the cause. Their membership included more than 130,000 farmers. Governor Schmedeman responded by mandating that companies such as cheese factories and milk distributors pay fifteen cents more per pound of milk. With that demand met, the Wisconsin Farm Holiday Organization then withdrew from the strike, but labor actions in the dairy industry continued for a couple of years. The farmers had cost themselves over \$10,000,000 in lost production, while the state had to pay \$100,000 for 2,000 troops, and Wisconsin counties paid \$70,000 for 4,000 special deputies to protect milk deliveries from strikers.⁴⁰ The strike ended in a loss for the smaller farmers, because they had no

³⁷ William Thompson, *The History of Wisconsin: v. V, War, a New Era, and Depression, 1924-1940*, (Stevens Point, Wisconsin: Worzalla Publishing Company,) 1990, 409-410, 413-319.

³⁸ Herbert Jacobs, "The Wisconsin Milk Strikes," *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, v. 35, 1 Autumn, (1951): 30-35.

³⁹ "Milk Dealers in 6 Counties Serve Notice," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, February 21, 1933.

⁴⁰ Jacobs, 30-35.

money to pay their bills. The milk that had been dumped was a complete loss. Dairy farmers hoped President Roosevelt would have an answer to the agricultural problems in the state, but unfortunately their problems went largely unanswered.

Fond du Lac County experienced many of the features of the dairy strike. Dairy plants had to close on May 12, 1933, the eve of a major strike action. The holiday was set so farmers could agree on a set price for milk. The dairy plants wouldn't even sell milk to most customers that day. They would only sell milk to children under eight, invalids, and hospitals. About 10,000 farmers in Fond du Lac were ready to join in the milk strike. Local police tried to make sure that violence did not occur on the roads and at the dairies. The Galloway-West dairy plant closed at midnight due to the strike.⁴¹ By fall 1933 both the Milk Pool and the Farm Holiday Association strikers' organization had concluded that President Roosevelt would not support an increased price for milk production. The strike "petered out" during the first ten days of November, as farmers in the striking groups gradually voted to reopen milk plants.⁴² President Roosevelt had failed to solve the problems of the dairy farmers; in turn, their efforts at direct action had failed, too.

The Election of 1932 brought many changes in Fond du Lac. Fond du Lac County, traditionally a Republican stronghold, cast 15,100 votes for Franklin D. Roosevelt while recording only 8,074 for President Herbert Hoover. The whole county overwhelmingly voted Democratic for all offices.⁴³ Fond du Lac voters voiced their demand for change in the oval office and in government in general. After his inauguration, President Roosevelt had to implement a plan for economic recovery for the United States. This was the New Deal. An editorial in the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* commented that President Roosevelt had three objectives: the security of the home, the security of livelihood, and the security of social insurance. The editorial observed that the ideals of President Roosevelt would be viewed as "fanciful" by some but would appeal to the majority because of their basic worth to the common American.⁴⁴

⁴¹ "Dairy Plants Close on Eve of Big Strike," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 12, 1933.

⁴² Jacobs, 30-35.

⁴³ "County Goes to Roosevelt and Madison Mayor," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 9, 1932.

⁴⁴ "Greater New Deal," *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 9, 1934.

Many new programs were created during the Great Depression and the New Deal era. The National Recovery Act (NRA) was touted as the centerpiece of the program that Franklin D. Roosevelt implemented. In a radio address given on August 29, 1933, a Reverend Stecker implored the citizens of Fond du Lac to enter into the recovery efforts wholeheartedly. The citizens must “co-operate and fulfill the spirit as well as the letter of the NRA in order to hasten the coming of those times which are prayed for by all Christian men and women.”⁴⁵ This was an attempt by a community religious leader to stimulate support for President Roosevelt’s efforts, but of course the NRA was soon declared unconstitutional by the United States Supreme Court.

Another notable program of the New Deal was the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC). This project gave young men a place to work in return for room, board, and some pay. In effect, it got them off the streets, thereby reducing unemployment, and carried out useful public works. John C. Viets, the county relief director who helped manage this program, opened opportunities for a large number of Fond du Lac County men and boys.⁴⁶ President Roosevelt got the idea of CCC camps from Canada, where work camps engaged unemployed single men in construction and environmental projects. It was seen as an alternative to “drifting” for young men.⁴⁷ They built roads and bridges, and developed parks and other projects. Of course men from Fond du Lac joined the CCC not because of the value of the projects, but because there weren’t any other jobs available. Over 1500 men from Fond du Lac County served in the CCC between 1933 and 1942.⁴⁸

Robert Hoey Sr., a resident of Fond du Lac, was one Fond du Lac man who joined the CCC. Hoey joined in 1939 and served two six-month terms.⁴⁹ He first learned of the CCC because he knew other men who had joined, and he thought it would be a good way to make some money. He applied at the Relief Department to join the organization.

⁴⁵ “NRA Program Offers Hope Of Brighter Winter, Says Pastor in Radio Address,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 29, 1933.

⁴⁶ “Forest Camps Are Opened to Relief Groups,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 26, 1935.

⁴⁷ “Labor Army Plan Like That of Roosevelt Provided Jobs for Thousands in Canada,” *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 28, 1933.

⁴⁸ Elmer Dins, Fond du Lac, Wisconsin Civilian Conservation Corps Replica Barracks 1933-1942. Brochure from Fond du Lac County Historical Society. (They formed Chapter 94 of the National Association of CCC Alumni.)

⁴⁹ Robert Hoey Sr., interview with the author, September 23, 2004.

There were certain eligibility requirements, including a limit on the amount of money one's family could make. Hoey was allowed to join because there was a vacancy when he applied. The men were first sent to Oshkosh for physical examinations. Hoey worked at Blue Lake with thirty other men for his first six-month term and was sent to Mountain, Wisconsin for his second term, where he worked as a logger. There were additional benefits that were generated by the CCC. The men who operated the camp bought food from the local community near the camp, and Hoey observed that this helped to support the economy where the camps were located. "In communities close to the camps, local purchases averaging about \$5,000 monthly staved off failure for many small businesses."⁵⁰

The men in the CCC lived in simple, army-like barracks. These were long, one-room dormitories in which all the men lived together. Hoey remembered that one of the best parts of the CCC was when new clothes and gear were distributed. He said it seemed just like Christmas; he got new shoes, underwear, socks, pants, shirts, and coats. The men were paid five dollars a month to keep for themselves, and twenty-five dollars was sent home to their families. No CCC camps were located in Fond du Lac County. There were three projects in the Milwaukee area, and there were a total of 129 camps in Wisconsin.

The Great Depression affected everyone in one-way or another. All classes of the population suffered, not just the poor. Bankers lost their businesses, investors lost their savings, farmers lost their livelihoods, and many lost their jobs and homes. The community, the state, and the nation struggled to cope with an enormous economic upheaval. Efforts to deal with the crisis provided some aid, to the unfortunate, but the effects of the Great Depression lingered for years, shaping the experiences of a generation of Fond du Lac citizens.

⁵⁰ Fred E. Leake, *Roosevelt's Tree Army: A Brief History of the Civilian Conservation Corps*. 1987. Pamphlet in Fond du Lac County Historical Society Collection.

Bechaud Brewery (ca. 1885)

The Brewing Industry in Fond du Lac

John W. Iwanski

Brewing was a good business in Fond du Lac, because residents of the city were good customers for the beverage. In frontier days, beer was one of the safest things available to drink. More recently, people in Fond du Lac have wanted beer because it remains a celebrated part of their culture and because it is a filling, refreshing way to get through to the next working day. During the social experiment of Prohibition, when the government said that people couldn't drink alcohol, they still found ways, however illegal, to obtain it. In modern times, Fond du Lac residents still want beer. They want it because they like it.

Since before the birth of civilization, people have been fermenting cereals to create beer and beer-like beverages. The first beer most likely was made accidentally by a bread maker who mixed yeast with grain malt. Ancient beer contained no barley, no hops, and no special beer yeast. Fermentation of grains and cereal products to make an intoxicating brew is described on tablets found in Mesopotamia in the area of Babylonia dated to a period between 7000 and 6000 B.C.E. In Egypt, many hieroglyphic texts describe the making of a beer that was believed to have medicinal powers. Ancient Egyptians considered beer a gift from the god Osiris and his sister-wife Isis. Beer was brewed in China by 2300 B.C.E., while in India a beer-like drink was popular by 1000 B.C.E.¹

Legions of the expanding Roman Empire introduced brewing to Northern Europe around 55 B.C.E. Monks in monasteries were the first brewers in German lands. In fact, the German word "Bier" derived from the Latin "*bibere*" (to drink). In Medieval times, between 400 and 500 different German monasteries brewed many different kinds of beer. In England, the Britons began to enjoy their own local beers while under Roman rule in the third and fourth centuries.² Roman rule collapsed in England in the fifth century, but the conquering Anglo-Saxons made brewing beer and ale even more important in England. Under the Anglo-Saxon monarchy in England, setting the price of ale was

¹ Jerry Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin* (Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), 3

² Clayton Roberts, David Roberts, *A History of England, v. I* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1991), 30.

considered important government business and officially done through the Office of Assize of Ale.³

Brewing arrived in America in 1607 by boat, as if it were itself a European immigrant on a supply ship bound for the unfortunate Jamestown Colony in Virginia. A few years later, when Adrian Block and Hans Christiansen came to New Amsterdam (present-day New York City) they brought the brewer's art and in 1612 built the first commercial brewery in the New World. When the Mayflower Pilgrims sailed for the New World in 1620, cooper⁴ John Alden was on board and in charge of keeping beer supplies intact during the long trip across the Atlantic.⁵ Brewing also arrived by boat when millions of Germans, seeking economic independence or to avoid military service in the old world, passed through New York's Castle Garden and Ellis Island after 1820. Many of America's greatest brewing empires were started by German immigrants. In total, over seven million Germans emigrated from Europe and went to America, producing tens of millions of descendants, including many residents of Fond du Lac.⁶

In Germany brewing had been a fact of life. As in other parts of the country, many of the German immigrants who came to Fond du Lac in the city's early days brought with them a taste for beer, a taste that had been cultivated partly out of necessity and partly out of tradition. Safer to drink than most of the water one might come across, beer also served to establish a connection with the land and the past. If nature was kind enough to bless the land, and if the grain for malting was successfully kept from parasites and insects, then the hard work of the farmers, the grain haulers, the brewers, the coopers and the merchants and vendors would bear plenty of safe, nutritious, refreshing, and yes, intoxicating brew. Thus the brewing industry provided a safe alternative to water and helped keep several trades strong. The local brewer was an important part of the community, and brewing was an honorable trade.

³ Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin*, 5-6.

⁴ Coopers were important because they crafted wooden storage barrels for holding, aging, and transporting vital beverages.

⁵ Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin*, 7-8.

⁶ *Chronicle of America* (Farmborough, England: Chronicle Communications Ltd., 1993), 922-923.

As new arrivals in America, many Germans drank beers that they themselves had brewed in their homes. A few brewers were fortunate enough to have access to fine barley and other grains, but for most the ingredients were often whatever fermentable grains and other ingredients could be found, and often this was reflected in the quality of the brew. However, those who had a real talent for the art of brewing could attempt to make a career from their brewing achievements.

Newly arrived German immigrants, some of whom possessed the talent for brewing, fanned out across America. Many settled in the Midwest, where they could afford to own land, farm, open shops or otherwise become part of a local economy. Thousands came to Wisconsin every year and settled in places like Milwaukee, Oshkosh, La Crosse, Wausau, Sheboygan and Fond du Lac.

Over the centuries some brewers passed recipe secrets down through generations, until their families had become brewing dynasties. Some immigrants came to the New World bringing their brewing secrets with them, such as Fond du Lac's Joseph Schussler, while others began brewing professionally for the first time in America.⁷ Richard Owens, Wisconsin's first major commercial brewer, is one of those who entered the brewing business after his arrival in the United States.⁸ In Wisconsin's cities, particularly in Fond du Lac, the history of brewing is primarily a German story. Natives from places such as Bavaria, Saxony, Baden, and Hessen all arrived in Fond du Lac and worked in the brewing industry.⁹

When German immigrants arrived in Fond du Lac they found a young city bustling with an increasingly diversified economy that focused on processing grain and refining timber. Once local farmers had successfully clear-cut their newly purchased land, they found that the soil, after centuries of decomposing forest vegetation, was very conducive to grow wheat and raise dairy cattle. When the weather was right, Fond du Lac was blessed with grain, work and prosperity.

In 1851 Fond du Lac became connected to the nation's growing system of railroads. The coming of the railroad meant grain products from Fond du Lac could be

⁷ *History of Fond du Lac County* (Chicago, Illinois: Western Historical Company, 1880), 858.

⁸ Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin*, 15-16.

⁹ Wayne L. Kroll, *Badger Breweries, Past and Present*, (Jefferson, Wisconsin: 1976), 25-26.

sold even farther away, but even more importantly, the railroad helped Fond du Lac become a lumber center.¹⁰ The men who were cutting down the great northern forests of the state kept timber floating down the waterways, especially in the 1870s. A city like Fond du Lac could process the trees into lumber and then ship the resulting finished boards from the city on railroad cars. By the 1870s the Fond du Lac River, which flowed right through the city and connected it to Lake Winnebago, was lined with lumber mills. By 1870 Fond du Lac's lumber processing firms made it an industrial hub and the second largest city in the state of Wisconsin.¹¹

Although makeshift frontier breweries were set up by John Phillips at Mineral Point (south of Madison in Green County) in 1835 and by Henry Rablin and Thomas Bray at Elk Grove (outside Platteville in southwestern Wisconsin) in 1836, the first major brewery in a Wisconsin city was started in 1840 by a young Welshman, Richard Owens, of Milwaukee. Owens, who had been a farmer in his native land, had grown tired of traveling among American cities selling French bur stones for milling grain. He purchased land and cleared it. Next he sailed to Michigan City, Indiana to acquire supplies. His first brew kettle was a wooden box with a copper sheet lining, capable of producing five barrels of beer.¹² In July, his first beer was ready, a common British ale.¹³ Owens' beer sold well and soon he needed a bigger kettle. By 1845, he owned a forty-gallon kettle and was making ales, porters and even Scotch whiskey.¹⁴

In Milwaukee and in Fond du Lac one could eventually also find plenty of the raw materials needed to make fine German beer. In the 1880s, Fond du Lac County ranked first in the state in barley production.¹⁵ Hops were also grown on many county farms. Fresh water was available in abundance, and yeast production was also a sizable Fond du Lac industry. In fact, brothers John and Henry Boyle, who had arrived in Fond du Lac penniless, built their Northwestern Yeast Company into a nationally recognized firm.

¹⁰ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1991), 36-37.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 58-61.

¹² A brew kettle is the (usually large and made from copper) container in which fermented grain malt is brewed into beer. Some modern brew kettles at major breweries are three to five stories tall.

¹³ Ale is heavily flavored, bitter malted beverage in the English style.

¹⁴ Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin*, 15-16.

¹⁵ Mentzer, 60.

They claimed to have the “world’s largest yeast factory” at the corner of Main and Johnson Streets and became millionaires and philanthropists by selling their five-cent yeast packets.¹⁶

Thus, with its abundance of barley, yeast, hops, water and German immigrants, Fond du Lac looked like an ideal place to begin a brewing business. Many such firms sprang into being over the years. The brewers are all gone today, but to anyone who has taken an interest in Fond du Lac’s brewing history, their names easily come to mind: Frey, Bechaud, Engel, Hauser, Dix, Schussler, Sander, and Chapman are among the most notable.¹⁷

The first to arrive and begin a commercial brewery in Fond du Lac were the Frey Brothers. Charles and Jacob Frey arrived in Fond du Lac in the spring of 1849. That summer, the brothers opened their brewing and grain-dealing firm, J. & C. Frey, three years before Fond du Lac was officially incorporated as a city. The combination of the brewing and grain business was a common pairing, then and now. The Frey brewery was successful enough to keep them in business for parts of five decades. In later years, their beer was even bottled and exported. In 1866, the Freys were able to purchase a grain elevator that gave them a capacity of 30,000 bushels.¹⁸

At no time during the life of their business did the Freys dominate the beer market in Fond du Lac. Outside competition was intense from brewers in Oshkosh, Madison, Green Bay, Sheboygan, Racine, the already-growing breweries at La Crosse, and the giant among brewing cities, Milwaukee. By 1855 another major brewing firm was started in Fond du Lac. Hauser and Dix was located at the corner of Portland and Division Streets, a mere stone’s throw from the Freys.¹⁹ Hauser and Dix hoped to move their brewery to Taycheedah, where they could use natural spring water to brew their beer. They began constructing a facility there. However, the firm experienced low profits, and this forced them out of business before they could finish construction of their new brewery in the

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 115.

¹⁷ Kroll, *Badger Breweries, Past and Present*, 25-26.

¹⁸ *History of Fond du Lac County* (1880), 806.

¹⁹ Kroll, 25-26.

early 1870s.²⁰ By 1865 even Ripon had the sizable Haas-Ripon City Brewery. John Haas, a native of Hessen, in Germany, a former employee of the Hauser and Dix and Frey Breweries, opened his business near the Jefferson Street Sheboygan and Fond du Lac railroad depot.²¹ His 1880 average production amounted to about 1200 barrels of beer.²²

The boom in the brewing industry was not exclusive to any one part of Wisconsin. By the early 1850s new breweries were being formed everywhere in the state, especially in areas, such as Milwaukee, with large German populations. The brewing industry grew despite a law passed in 1849 that required prospective brewery owners to put up a one thousand dollar bond. In enacting this law, legislators reasoned that those who created and sold liquor also were responsible for the social problems associated with alcohol consumption. The law stated that the bond was to be paid by any liquor vendor “with adequate sureties on which he could be sued for any damages either to the community or to an individual which might be thought to result from his sale of liquor.” The legislature’s message was clear: Let those who sell liquor, and (in the eyes of the lawmakers) create so many drunkards, widows, orphans and paupers, pay for the societal harm they cause.²³

Most Wisconsin breweries specialized in producing quality lagers, the German favorite. Lagers are beers that are made to ferment with special yeast that works at cool temperatures. After fermentation, the brew is stored cold for a variable amount of time before it is put into barrels or bottled. At the time of packaging, lager begins a slow deterioration, thus fresh lagers typically taste the best.²⁴ The American-made lager took on its own distinct taste (or lack thereof) over the years, but the inspiration was strictly Old World. Other ethnic groups who arrived in America at first drank primarily ales and other robust, dark beers, but also grew to prefer the clean, smooth taste of German-American style lagers.

²⁰ A.T. Glaze, *Incidents and Anecdotes of Early Days and History of Business in the City and County of Fond du Lac from Early Times to the Present* (Fond du Lac, Wis.: P.B. Haber Printing Co., 1905), 197.

²¹ *History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin* (1880), 893.

²² Kroll, *Badger Breweries, Past and Present*, 120-121.

²³ Apps, *Breweries of Wisconsin*, 60.

²⁴ Michael Jackson, *Michael Jackson’s Beer Companion* (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Running Press, 1993), 196.

In Fond du Lac and other Wisconsin cities, one of the most commonly brewed types of lager was and is Pilsner. This beer was first made in Pilsen, Bohemia, in 1842. Unlike all beers introduced before it, the newly brewed Pilsner was clear and golden. It was the first lager to exhibit such characteristics. Today, many golden lagers exist, but only the lagers with noticeable malt character and an emphasis on the hops in the taste can truly claim to be made Pilsner-style.²⁵

Most neighborhoods in Wisconsin towns and cities had at least one brewery. The city of Milwaukee was fast becoming an internationally recognized brewing center. By 1844, over one thousand German immigrants came through the city each week.²⁶ These newcomers gave beer makers not only a strong customer base, but also a field from which to hire experienced brewery workers. Fresh water was abundant, especially in the warmer seasons, as were ice sheets that could be harvested for storage in winter. Additionally, railroads and the harbor in Milwaukee made it possible to ship beer made in that city to places such as nearby Chicago, and even faraway New York City. By 1857, Milwaukee was shipping 30,000 barrels of beer annually out of state.²⁷ Even though Milwaukee, a city with a population of 20,061 in 1850, could not compare in size, by 1873 its brewing reputation rivaled those of New York, Philadelphia and St. Louis.²⁸

The story was the same statewide. Brewing was big business for the state of Wisconsin. The immigrant labor was readily available. The agricultural base was outstanding. The water and rail transportation made it possible to sell Wisconsin-made beer all over the Great Lakes region and down the rivers to cities south and west of the state.

Unfortunately, the brewing industry was not immune to economic factors such as the Panic of 1857. Statewide, the Panic hit beer makers hard. Sales were down dramatically, having dropped from 125,000 barrels annually to 42,000 between 1857 and 1863.²⁹ Some breweries had to close their doors during this period. Fortunately, during

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 210.

²⁶ Apps, 18.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 19. See also Thomas C. Cochran, *The Pabst Brewing Company: History of an American Business*, (New York: New York University Press, 1948).

²⁸ *World Almanac and Book of Facts 1995*, (Mahwah, New Jersey: Funk & Wagnalls, 1995), 381; Apps, 21.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 18.

this six-year period, neither of Fond du Lac's commercial breweries, Frey or Hauser & Dix, had to shut down their operations. After the Civil War came to a close and the economy stabilized, a new surge of German immigrants helped the demand for beer in Wisconsin return to match its previous levels. The brewing business boomed in Fond du Lac in the decade after the war, as new beer makers set up many small brewing companies.

By the late 1860s, Moritz Krembz was brewing beer in his facility on Taycheedah Road.³⁰ In 1865, August Richter also began brewing commercially in Fond du Lac from his business at Main and Eighth Streets. In 1868, Andrew Schenkle began his brewing business near the west branch of the Fond du Lac River at 46 Grove Street. The Lackman Brewery on First Street was opened in 1865, although it closed the following year.³¹ Some of Fond du Lac's larger, more notable brewing companies followed these early openings.

In 1872, Joseph Schussler, a former employee at the Frey brewery, opened his "West Hill Brewery" at 172 Hickory Street.³² Schussler was born in the German state of Baden in June, 1819. There, at the age of fifteen, he began to learn the cooper trade. He also studied the art of brewing in his native land. When Schussler came to Milwaukee, he married Fannie Newkirch and continued to brew beer there until 1850. That year, he moved to Oshkosh and worked once again as a cooper for eleven years. In 1861, he became a brewery worker for the Frey brothers. He held this job until 1865, when he once again became a cooper. Thus, Joseph Schussler was a man with two valuable skills, both of them related to the brewing industry. Finally, in 1872, he became involved with brewing beer for the third and final time, when he opened his own brewing company. Schussler's unique brewing craftsmanship was respected locally. In 1880, a book of Fond du Lac historical profiles contained this critique of Schussler's beer: "His brewing method is different from others, and known only to himself."³³ After six years in business, in 1878, Schussler was selling over one thousand barrels of beer annually. Schussler stayed in business until 1890, when his sons took over and the company

³⁰ Kroll, 26.

³¹ R.T. Elliott, *Saloons of Fond du Lac* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: R.T. Elliott, 1997), i, vi.

³² Kroll, 26.

became known as “Schussler Brothers.” The younger Schusslers, however, did not stay in the beer business for long, for their West Hill Brewery finally closed its doors in 1892.³⁴

Adam Sander began production of his beers from his plant on eleven acres of land one mile south of the city on the Fond du Lac and Milwaukee Road. Sander’s brewery, under different names, remained in business for almost fifty years.³⁵ Sander was born in Germany in March 1832. As a young man, he married Gertrude Gaubenheimer and moved first to Baltimore, Maryland, and then to Wisconsin, living briefly in Milwaukee and Plymouth before finally settling in Fond du Lac in 1864. Late that year, he began a modest brewing enterprise. During the following decades, his brewing company grew into a family business. When they were teenagers, his sons Edwin and Albert began working at the brewery. By 1880, the enterprise was producing 750 barrels per year. In 1898, at the age of sixty-six, Adam Sander decided to retire and handed over the brewing operations to his sons.

As new brewery owners, Edwin and Albert decided to institute major improvements to their facility. These changes included physical plant additions, state of the art bottling equipment, and a modern ice plant. The improvements paid off, and by 1912, Sander Brothers Brewing was selling six thousand barrels annually.³⁶ At the top of their game, the brothers were finally forced out of business when alcohol prohibition came to America.

In 1871, Fond du Lac’s most successful brewery was opened at 515 Main Street by the brothers Frank, John and Capt. A.G. Bechaud.³⁷ Formed during the presidency of Ulysses S. Grant, their brewing company also set the standard for longevity among Fond du Lac beer makers, surviving until 1941, when Franklin Delano Roosevelt began his third term in office.

³³ *History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin* (1880), (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 858.

³⁴ Kroll, 26.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 26

³⁶ Maurice McKenna, *History of Fond du Lac County*, (Chicago: S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912), 477-478.

³⁷ Kroll, 25.

The Bechaud brothers, all born in Bavaria, started brewing at their Main Street location but they also bought lakeshore property on Lake Winnebago just northwest of the city limits, where they envisioned locating their permanent brewing empire. However, the beachfront brew-house was not to be. Instead, in 1873, the Bechauds opened their new large brewery on Eleventh Street, just west of Hickory Street.³⁸ The Bechauds also maintained a Main Street address. Their “sample room” gave people a chance to enjoy the freshest beer the company had to offer.³⁹ The most popular brand produced by Bechaud, “Empire” was bottled and sold in various cities. Their other beers included “Münchner” and “Pilsener.” In all, the company sold an average of 15,000 barrels of their beers annually.⁴⁰

Jacob and Charles Frey managed to keep their business strong, despite all of the competition that had grown around them. Like the Bechauds, the Freys owned a Main Street saloon in addition to their brewing and grain dealing business. By 1880, they were considered to be the city’s oldest living original German residents.⁴¹ The next year, the Freys’ brewing business fell apart. It was not competition or lack of sales that destroyed their brewing enterprise. Late in the fall of 1880, the brothers showed no signs that they would soon be out of business. However, within a few months they were both dead. The end of the Frey Brewery is a tragic story.

On New Year’s Eve, 1880, Jacob Frey succumbed to Bright’s Disease.⁴² Although both Jacob and Charles were married and had children, the brothers were very close and relied on each other for advice and support. Charles was left to run both his life and the business by himself, and his mental state deteriorated as a result of the strain. He was said to have told acquaintances that he was incapable of handling his responsibilities, although he showed little in the way of outward signs of his torment.

On the morning of Saturday, May 14, 1881, Charles arrived at his saloon as usual at seven a.m. but told his bartender John Pulse he was not feeling well. Taking the grain elevator key, he then exited and quietly entered Pritz’s grocery store and purchased a

³⁸ *History of Fond du Lac County* (1880), 871.

³⁹ *1880 Fond du Lac City Directory* (Fond du Lac, WI: Holland Co., 1880), 306.

⁴⁰ Kroll, 25

⁴¹ *History of Fond du Lac County, Wisconsin* (1880), 806.

⁴² *Fond du Lac Journal*, January 6, 1881, 3.

rope. Pritz asked Frey if he planned to use the rope at his home. “Yes, over there,” he replied, motioning out the door as he left. At two p.m., Frey was seen walking along the Forest Avenue railroad crossing and then walking to his elevator building. Later that afternoon, John Wolff, a worried business acquaintance whom Charles was supposed to meet earlier in the day, contacted the police, and Officer Commo arrived at the elevator building. The two men struggled to enter the elevator building, and there they found Charles hanging by the neck from the rope he had purchased that morning. He had a chair next to him and a knife in his pocket, perhaps in case he changed his mind, or if the pain from the rope was too great.

A pair of notes were found on Frey’s body. In one, he stated that he wanted to be buried quickly. In the other he wrote to his daughters. “I cannot stay with you much longer. I have no rest day or night. I cannot express my feelings. Regards to all and tell them to forgive me Give John Pulse [his bartender] the saloon Tell everybody to stand by me. Dear children, I must close. Enclosed you will find some money. I cannot write anymore. Your unfortunate . . . Papa.”

An inquest was held and the death was officially ruled a suicide. Contrary to the wishes of the deceased, Frey’s corpse was taken home, and a wake was held before burial at Rienzi Cemetery. And that’s how John Pulse woke up one day as a tavern worker and went to sleep a tavern owner. The brewery went out of operation, and Frey’s children sold the property. Thus ended the story of the first brewing family in Fond du Lac.⁴³

As more and more Germans poured into Wisconsin in the last decades of the nineteenth century, many of them interested in finding a good brewing establishment to patronize, more and more breweries were being opened. Additionally, new technological developments made new options in brewing available. Previously beer was sold exclusively in kegs or casks, because bottled beer spoiled too quickly. But in the 1870s, Louis Pasteur helped brewers put their beer in bottles when he formulated a way to kill bacteria in liquid by heating it.⁴⁴ Because brewers began to use “Pasteurization,” their beer could sit in bottles for much longer periods of time. In 1883, Danish biochemist Emil Christian Hansen (1842-1909), employed by the Carlsberg laboratories of

⁴³ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 16, 1881, 4.

Copenhagen, showed that certain yeasts were actually harmful to proper fermentation. He then created a special yeast culture specifically for beer making, which was put into use at the Carlsberg Brewery. That same year, William J. Uihlein, part owner of Schlitz Brewing, brought Hansen's special culture to Milwaukee and began using it at his company. In 1887, Milwaukee's Pabst Brewery also acquired Hansen's secret yeast. At first, only the larger breweries like Pabst and Schlitz could afford to implement these scientific developments in their brewing process. Other small brewers would have to wait years before they could follow suit.⁴⁵

At the turn of the century, Milwaukee was fast becoming the indisputable giant in the industry, despite its relatively small population compared to many other American cities. According to Jerry Apps, this may have been because the smaller population meant easier accessibility to brewing resources, including grain and water, and also a greater need to expand the marketing area for Milwaukee-made beers. Even though barley and hops by that time had to be shipped to Milwaukee from other states in order to meet the brewers' demands, the brewers were able to keep their prices competitive.⁴⁶

Unfortunately for beer makers, temperance movements grew right alongside the brewing industry.⁴⁷ Temperance and even prohibition ideas were not new to Wisconsin. In 1855, the state legislature passed a measure aiming to bring about statewide prohibition of the sale, but not the manufacture, of alcoholic drinks. However, Governor William Barstow vetoed the measure, and Wisconsin remained safe for the businesses of innkeepers and tavern owners who made their money tapping barrels.⁴⁸

An incident in 1852 in Fond du Lac illustrated the kind of behavior temperance leaders perceived as caused by alcohol consumption. One fall night, B.F. Moore won an exciting race for assembly over Joe Wagner. Moore's supporters decided to celebrate at Chandler's Beer and Pie Shop. Their exuberance turned to destructive behavior, and beer glasses started flying. A.T. Glaze, a Fond du Lac businessman and historian, happened to

⁴⁴ Apps, 40-41.

⁴⁵ Kroll, 1.

⁴⁶ Apps, 20-21.

⁴⁷ On activities of Fond du Lac's early temperance societies, see Kate G. Berres, "The Temperance Movement in Fond du Lac, 1847-1878," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Action Printing, 2002), 55-70.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.

look in the establishment's window to see what was causing the noise. Just as he peered in, he was hit in the face with a beer glass. A local doctor spent almost an hour picking pieces of glass from Glaze's head. According to Glaze, the thrower, a young lawyer named O.B. "Ben" Taylor, was so embarrassed that he would never meet Glaze to apologize. Taylor even went so far as to avoid Glaze on the street. Soon after, Taylor moved to California, where he drowned. Glaze went on to write a book on local lore, and he included this incident in his work.⁴⁹

Despite attempts by beer makers and drinkers to portray their favorite beverage as the harmless cousin of hard liquors such as whiskey, after 1860 temperance groups gradually shifted their ground from differentiating among beer, cider, and "hard" liquor toward condemnation of consumption of all alcoholic beverages.⁵⁰ Temperance groups such as the Women's Christian Temperance Union, founded in 1874, successfully moved the debate on reducing alcohol use to the forefront of the country's consciousness. Soon, prohibitionist groups such as the Anti-Saloon League were gaining support in their attempts to outlaw alcoholic beverages altogether.

The most noted tavern incident in Fond du Lac was the infamous "Carrie Nation Hatchet Swinging Episode" of 1902. This performance has been both exaggerated and widely publicized. Carry Amelia Moore Nation, known as "Carrie," the famous prohibitionist leader from Kansas, was noted for swinging her hatchet and damaging taverns in her attempts to bring attention to her cause. Cutting an impressive figure at almost six feet tall and weighing 180 pounds, and accompanied by her rallying cry, "Smash, ladies, smash," Carrie Nation was arrested more than 30 times between 1900 and 1910 for damaging saloons.

Nation was scheduled to speak at Lakeside Park twice on July 16, 1902. She did not arrive for the first lecture. Some who had gathered there to see the spectacle joked that Nation was off on a drinking binge. She did, however, make an appearance for the second speech, although she was ten minutes late. The next night, Nation asked E.J. Schmidt if she could speak at his tavern on the northwest corner of Main and Division

⁴⁹ Glaze, 227.

⁵⁰ Berres, 56.

Streets. Schmidt recognized that the visit would bring good publicity, and he agreed to allow the famed prohibitionist to appear, but only if she came *sans* hatchet.⁵¹

Nation addressed the crowd and eventually began an inflammatory tirade against Germans and their love of beer. She was mocked by some in the tavern. In her aggravation, she went so far as to say that every German in Wisconsin should be blown up “with dynamite.” When one of her detractors then offered her a bottle of whiskey, she reached under her dress and produced her famous hatchet. She swung, smashing the bottle and it looked like her famous tavern-destroying antics would begin, but Schmidt was able to relieve her of the weapon before she performed her routine.⁵²

Nation’s national popularity showed the direction in which the debate on alcohol was moving. By 1913, groups such as the Anti-Saloon League had secured a major place in debating the future of national policy. Prohibitionists were working for anti-liquor laws in several states and gaining support for a constitutional amendment to prohibit alcoholic beverages.

The movement for legally enforced prohibition had its first victory when the United States Senate voted in favor of the Eighteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution on August 17, 1917. Four months later, the House of Representatives also passed the amendment. The next step, ratification by the states, was completed on January 29, 1919. The amendment officially took effect on January 16, 1920. However, prohibition actually arrived even before the amendment became official, and even before the October 1919 Volstead Act was passed. Even though the First World War had officially ended with the signing of the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, the U.S. Senate did not ratify the Treaty, and wartime legislation passed in November 1918, establishing prohibition on the sale of alcohol during the war went into effect three days after the Treaty of Versailles was signed on July 1, 1919.⁵³

⁵¹ In a sign over the establishment’s door, Schmidt’s Sample Room still advertises the incident.

⁵² Stan Gores, “The Night Carry Nation Pulled out her Hatchet at E.J. Schmidt’s Bar,” *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, June 25, 1986, 64-65.

⁵³ Apps, 66. See also Edward Behr, *Prohibition: Thirteen Years That Changed America*, (New York: 1996), and Joseph Schafer, “Prohibition in Early Wisconsin,” in *Wisconsin Magazine of History*, IX:3, March 8, 1925, 281-299.

In the weeks before the July 1 date, Fond du Lac's liquor dealers hoped for a Presidential reprieve from the war-time prohibition since the fighting in Europe had ended months before, on November 11, 1918. H.P. Kuicks, a Fond du Lac wholesale vendor of liquor, was not optimistic. He told *The Daily Commonwealth* that he did not expect any relief from President Woodrow Wilson. He was preparing to stop selling alcohol as of July 1. A.F. Watke, another wholesale liquor dealer in the city, said, "It appears the nation will go dry July 1. The only way out is for the President to declare mobilization [for the war] complete."⁵⁴

On June 24, 1919, the Wisconsin State Senate passed a measure that it was hoped would legalize beer containing no more than two and one-half per cent alcohol by volume, but the Assembly failed to pass it days later.⁵⁵ The Senate also voted to make it legal for Wisconsin brewers to produce what was called "near-beer," a malted beverage designed to taste like beer yet contain no alcohol, after national prohibition took effect. Sander Brothers Brewing, like other breweries in Fond du Lac, had already stopped brewing on May 1, and the company was selling off its beer inventory in order to use up stocks prior to July 1. This firm indicated on June 23 that they were contemplating the option of brewing near-beer in their plant after prohibition took effect.⁵⁶

As July 1 neared, it became apparent that hope had run out for those who made their living selling alcoholic beverages. On June 28, *The Daily Commonwealth* ran an editorial wishing good luck to all the soon-to-be unemployed bartenders in Fond du Lac. The paper's editors expressed hope that the period of adjustment after July 1 would make all the saloonkeepers better off in the long run.⁵⁷

On June 30, Prohibition Eve, local brewers, saloons and dealers were selling off the last of their inventory. The Kummerow & Menge dealership had sold out its complete stock of liquor by ten a.m. A.F. Watke sold over thirty cases of hard spirits and filled several hundred jugs for customers.⁵⁸ That night, revelers from all over the city went wild. *The Daily Commonwealth* observed, "The last days of the Babylonian Era had

⁵⁴ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 19, 1919, 5.

⁵⁵ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 27, 1919, 1.

⁵⁶ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 24, 1919, 8.

⁵⁷ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 28, 1919, 6.

⁵⁸ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 30, 1919, 2.

nothing on June 30, 1919.” Saloons were packed for one last night of mayhem. A party at the Fond du Lac Elks’ Club was awash with liquor. Most notably, a gang of drunken men and boys paraded screaming through town, swinging beer bottles and singing, “I’ve got the blues, I’ve got the blues, I’ve got the alcoholic blues” and “Hail, hail, the gang’s all here.”⁵⁹ Right up to the last moment, Fond du Lac’s drinkers insisted on going out with a bang.

The next day, America woke up dry. On July 1, the sale of alcoholic beverages was now illegal. Ironically, the Wisconsin cities of Ashland and Madison had voted to go “wet” after two years of prohibiting the sale of liquor during the war, a law that was to go into effect the same day that the nation went “dry.”⁶⁰

The Eighteenth Amendment took effect on midnight, January 16, 1920. After that time, any production of alcoholic beverages was prohibited constitutionally. *The Daily Commonwealth* reminded local citizens that “zero hour is 12:01 tonight.” To clear up any confusion, the paper also warned, “Alcohol, brandy, whiskey, rum, gin, beer, ale, porter, wine, or any spirituous, vinous, malt or fermented liquor, liquids and compounds, whether medicated, proprietary, patented or not, and by whatever name called, which contains one-half of one percent or more of alcohol by volume and which are fit for beverage purposes may not be manufactured.”⁶¹ That night, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union hosted a celebration at the library hall in Fond du Lac. They opened by singing “Onward Christian Soldiers” and “America” before listening to a speech by John Strange, the former Lieutenant Governor of Wisconsin and president of the Strange Paper Manufacturing Company of Neenah. Strange’s topic was “The Wisdom of Prohibition.” He said, “The paramount need of the day is law enforcement,” and that prohibition is “morally, socially, and financially” valuable. His remarks were applauded and the event’s finale was a rendition of the song “Victory” sung by Fond du Lac resident Herb Fenner.⁶² The song was fitting. It was true—those who favored prohibition had had their victory.

⁵⁹ *The Daily Commonwealth*, July 1, 1919, 1.

⁶⁰ *The Daily Commonwealth*, June 30, 1919, 1.

⁶¹ *The Daily Commonwealth*, January 16, 1920, 1.

⁶² *The Daily Commonwealth*, January 17, 1920, 4.

Brewers and their supporters had been complacent and had done too little, too late to fight prohibition. A blend of Progressive-era social reformism and an anti-alcohol fever, combined with World War I-era distrust of Germany and all things German, helped to topple the unprepared brewers. How does one defend intoxication in the face of moral posturing and ethnic stereotyping?

Wisconsin's fifth largest industry was being forcibly shut down by a constitutional amendment. In these dark times, brewery workers, tavern owners, inn keepers, farmers, bottlers, coopers, cork makers, and shippers were all deeply affected by the change in federal law. Major brewing centers such as Milwaukee were hit especially hard. A few brewers, such as Milwaukee's Miller, were able to make it through the prohibition era by producing sodas, seltzers, and near-beers. However, most brewing businesses crumbled and folded.

Ultimately, most Americans came to view the Eighteenth Amendment as a failed social experiment. Organized crime built a dynasty around the alcohol black market. Some of the liquor not bought through criminal channels was disguised as medicine and sold by traveling "doctors," often with disastrous results due to lack of proper safety procedures in preparation. In some areas, "ridge-runners" or "moonshiners" set up stills in rural areas where they fashioned home-made spirits. Even in modest homes, otherwise law-abiding folks broke federal law by making liquors on their stoves and in their bathtubs. In 1925, the Prince of Wales, the future Edward VIII, who was visiting the United States, when asked what he thought of America's prohibition of alcohol, wryly responded, "Great! When does it begin?"⁶³

People found their way around the law, and the level of criminalized activity was so extensive that it was an impossible task for the Federal government to control it. The criminal black market and other adverse latent effects of institutionalized prohibition were gradually seen to outweigh, by far, any benefits and value gained from the experiment and its consequences.

In February 1933, Congress submitted a repeal resolution of the Eighteenth Amendment to the states. In March, Congress passed the Cullen Act, which redefined the

⁶³ Clifton Daniel, et al, eds., *Chronicle of America* (New York: Dorling Kindersley, 1997), 661.

meaning of the term “intoxicating beverage,” making beer with 3.2 per cent alcohol legal to manufacture and sell. Finally, on December 5, 1933, the entire “Noble Experiment” was brought to a close. The Twenty-First Amendment was ratified, repealing prohibition nationally. Although a few states, such as Kansas, Mississippi and Oklahoma, maintained their own alcohol prohibition laws, in most states brewing was re-established as a legal business.⁶⁴ Celebrations commenced all over the nation, not the least in Wisconsin.

Franklin Farvour tells of the night that the news of the official repeal of prohibition reached the town of Ripon, in Fond du Lac County. A peculiar, yet familiar noise rose from the old Haas Brewhouse: “Steam was up in the brewery. The brewery whistle sounded and it didn’t quit.irate citizens called the police department and the one night-duty man, my grandfather, went to the brewery to get things quiet. When he got there, much to his chagrin he found the mayor, J. Harold Bumby, pulling the whistle rope. The noise didn’t stop for some time.”⁶⁵

For the next four years, John Haas’ old brewery was back in operation under new ownership and known as the Ripon Brewing Company. Under two different presidents, brew-master Jack Wittstock was able to produce 6,000 barrels each year. The brewery obtained a copyright on its main brand “Old Derby,” but unfortunately the brewing industry became a different ball game after prohibition: the smaller brewery became, for the time being, a thing of the past. The Ripon Brewing Company ceased operations in 1937.⁶⁶

Amid the celebration in Fond du Lac, Bechaud brewery reopened. One new, if ephemeral, entrant into the Fond du Lac array of brewing concerns was announced, too. The “Pioneer Brewery” is said to have produced only one barrel of beer before it disappeared. Pioneer’s location and proprietors are not known. An idea, an announcement, a supposed barrel of beer, and a mystery are all that remain of the firm.⁶⁷

⁶⁴ Bill Yenne, *Beers of North America* (New York, NY: Gallery Books, 1986), 90-93.

⁶⁵ Apps, 73.

⁶⁶ Kroll, 121.

⁶⁷ Kroll, 26.

Sadly, most of the brewing companies in Fond du Lac never reopened. The Star Brewing Company, Adolph Engel & Son, Excelsior, and the Sander Bros. Brewery were among the many brewers across the nation who shut down forever as a result of a decade of Prohibition under the Eighteenth Amendment.⁶⁸ Many of the brewing companies who did manage to re-open closed shortly thereafter.

By the end of 1933, Bechaud Brewing was the only commercial beer maker left in Fond du Lac, and they, too, were on the ropes. There were two major reasons the brewing industry was difficult for firms to re-enter in the 1930s. First, Prohibition had ended at the same time the American economy was in the darkest days of the Great Depression. Funds for investment in new enterprises were difficult to obtain. Secondly, the industry had changed too much for smaller companies to survive in the new environment. Big companies with more resources became predatory towards the minor brewers. Like Rip Van Winkle, small brewing companies awoke to find a different world, one in which making good beer was simply not enough. A brewing outfit that could not play the game of market economics stood to lose everything. While companies like Pabst and Anheuser-Busch were moving to nationalize their products and push local competitors out, small brewers like Bechaud just tried to stay afloat and keep their local sales comparable to those of the nationally-advertised beers. Additionally, there was new competition for manufacturers of non-alcoholic drinks. Fountain sodas and other soft drinks had become very popular during the 1920s, particularly among young people, and this group had always been an important market segment for beer makers.⁶⁹

The Bechauds halted production in 1937, but they kept the business intact until 1941, when the brewery officially closed. Bechaud, like all the others, became a piece of Fond du Lac's brewing history. The building still stands, although it has remained empty for years at a time. For a time it housed the city's buses during the 1960s. The lakeshore property once platted by the company as a potential brewing site never saw any brewery built there, and it is now known as Bechaud Beach.⁷⁰ In the 1990s, the Eleventh Street

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

⁶⁹ Yenne, 93.

⁷⁰ Ruth Shaw Worthing, *The History of Fond du Lac as Told by its Place-Names* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: R. Shaw Worthing, 1976), 11-12.

brewery building was a grain co-op, but the words “BREW HOUSE,” AND “[B]ECHAUD BREWING CO.” could still be seen on the façade, a visible reminder of the building’s almost seventy year stint as the cornerstone of Fond du Lac’s largest brewing company.⁷¹ The brewing industry in Fond du Lac persisted for eighty-eight years after the Freys began brewing their beer at Macy and Division, but after 1941, Fond du Lac was without a commercial brewery.

During the turbulent years of World War II, the anti-German sentiment of the era of the First World War did not recur. By this time, American brewers, even those with German roots, were thought of as purely American. Knowing that soldiers, sailors and marines liked beer as much as anybody, the wartime government and the beer makers set aside fifteen per cent of the industry’s production for enlisted men. These young men, many of whom had been loyal drinkers of their local brews, were thereby exposed to many national brands, helping establish new brand loyalties that undermined the few remaining local breweries.

The war also produced a remarkable expansion in the nation’s economy. Brewing businesses grew right alongside other industries. Nationally, between 1940 and 1945, brewers increased their annual production by fifty-one per cent to a whopping 80 million barrels.⁷²

In the decades after the war, brewing continued its growth, but the whole industry was faced with major changes. Due to advancing technology and improved transportation, the nation seemed to be shrinking. Places such Los Angeles and Milwaukee were no longer so far apart. If a company were to survive and compete, it now had to brew, sell and advertise nationally. The brewing industry was in transition, and some beer makers came to excel at the games of buyouts, takeovers and marketing wars. The G. Heileman Brewing Company of La Crosse, for instance, acquired dozens of brand names over the years. Brands that came from the formerly independent companies acquired over the years included Lone Star, Blatz, Carling, Colt .45, Rainier, Mickey’s, Schmidt, Kingsbury, Grain Belt, National Bohemian, Stag, Sterling, Falls City,

⁷¹ Kroll, 25.

⁷² Yenne, 96.

Wiedeman, Tuborg and Blitz-Weinhard.⁷³ Stroh's of Detroit was an even bigger player in the buyout game. The company purchased the larger Milwaukee Schlitz Brewing Company and the entire Schlitz family of beers in 1982. Stroh's acquisitions have included Augsburger, Goebel, Schlitz, Old Milwaukee, Piels, Schaefer, Thunder, Red Bull, Signature and Primo. Even though the Stroh's Brewery in Detroit has not made beer since 1985, the company as a whole averaged production of over 18 million barrels annually by 1994.⁷⁴ In 1996 Stroh's orchestrated another large takeover when it acquired fellow takeover giant G. Heileman Brewing.

Miller and Anheuser-Busch, the industry leaders, in addition to acquiring a multitude of brand names, have constructed brewing facilities in cities all across the United States and vigorously market their beers worldwide. Cities with Anheuser-Busch breweries include St. Louis, Los Angeles, Tampa, Houston, Jacksonville and Newark. Miller brewing operates facilities in Milwaukee, Fort Worth, Trenton, Ohio, Albany, Georgia, and Irwindale, a suburb of Los Angeles.⁷⁵

Fond du Lac brewers could not begin to compete in this struggle among giants. The same was true for most breweries statewide. Of the eighty-eight in operation in 1937, only a few remain in business today. Some, lacking the capital and resources of the giant beer makers, had to give up without even trying to compete in this new market. Such was the case for Fond du Lac's Bechaud. Others hung on for decades before shutting down. Among these smaller companies were Rahr's Brewing of Green Bay, which closed in 1966, the Potosi Brewing Company, closed in 1972, the People's Brewing Company of Oshkosh, which ended operations in 1972, Oshkosh Brewing, the original makers of Chief Oshkosh, closed in 1971, and the Berlin Brewing Company, which folded in 1964.⁷⁶

Bigger brewing companies also continued to fold over the years. When these companies could no longer stay in business, they attempted to sell off what they had that was of value. Some sold their brewing facilities to other beer makers, but these facilities

⁷³ Bill Yenne, *The Field Guide to North America's Breweries and Microbreweries* (New York: Crescent Books, 1994), 67-68.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 80-81.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 59, 73.

⁷⁶ Kroll, 17, 31-32, 107-108, 114.

usually were usually far from state-of-the-art. Almost all of the brewers, however, were able to sell their brand names. Blatz, Schlitz, and Pabst may all have ceased operations in their original plants, but these beers are still sold, or at least one can buy a beer with one of these names on the label. Even Old Milwaukee, made for years in Schlitz's Milwaukee brewery, is now made in a Minnesota brewery by Stroh's of Detroit.⁷⁷ Confusing? A misrepresentation? Schlitz itself, more than a quarter of a century ago the second largest brewer in the nation, has been closed for years. Schlitz beer is still available, but this brand is also made at one of the facilities owned by Stroh's.⁷⁸

Since 1850, nationwide, hundreds of brewers had emerged intact after such calamities as the Panic of 1857, the temperance movement, Prohibition, the Great Depression and six American wars, but ultimately the majority could not survive the era of beer nationalization. Today, the modern beer industry is a product of what University of Maryland sociologist George Ritzer calls the process of "McDonaldization," meaning a standard formula that is followed by all competing businesses, one in which variations are hard to find. Both brewers and consumers have come to value the efficiency, calculability and predictability they can find only with major national brands.⁷⁹ A Budweiser in Boston tastes the same as a Budweiser in Seattle. Miller Lite always tastes like Miller Lite, no matter how many cans one opens. A few multi-billion corporations, all producing similar-tasting beers, control most of the American brewing market.

Today, there are only a few breweries in Wisconsin. The two major brewers are Miller, itself a wholly owned subsidiary of the Philip Morris Corporation, and G. Heileman, owned by Stroh's. Moderately sized breweries include Sprecher of Milwaukee, Stevens Point Brewing, Joseph Huber Brewing of Monroe, and Leinenkugel's of Chippewa Falls, owned by Miller. Wisconsin's smaller breweries, or micro-breweries, include Capital Brewing of Middleton, Cherryland Brewing of Sturgeon Bay, Fox River Brewing of Appleton, the Appleton Brewing Company, Rowland's

⁷⁷ Yenne, *The Field Guide to North America's Breweries and Microbreweries*, 81.

⁷⁸ Yenne, *Beers of North America*, 161.

⁷⁹ George Ritzer, *The McDonaldization of Society* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Pine Forge Press, 1996), 9-11.

Calumet Brewing of Chilton, Brewmasters of Kenosha, the Water Street Brewery of Milwaukee and the Lakefront Brewery, also of Milwaukee.⁸⁰

The city of Fond du Lac has been without a commercial brewer in operation since 1937. The possibility of some individual opening a micro-brewery in the city is increasingly likely, but no major brewing company is likely to be located in a small city like Fond du Lac.

While there is increasing popular enthusiasm for distinctive micro-brewed beers, there is little reason to expect a return to an era of small brewing companies situated in every town. Micro-brews are popular, but the large corporations have already exploited this fad and are currently brewing beers under names that make it seem they are produced in micro-breweries. The products of the quaint-sounding “Plank Road Brewery,” for example, are made right alongside Miller’s other beers in the giant vats of Milwaukee’s “Miller Valley.”

While the commercial brewing of beer in Fond du Lac is a piece of history, a tour of the city quickly reveals that drinking beer is a favorite activity of many in Fond du Lac, as it has been since the early days of the city. Since early beers came exclusively in large barrels, saloons were popular from the city’s founding. Except during the Prohibition era, the saloon or bar business has been steady down to the present.

Already in 1876, Fond du Lac had seventeen taverns on Main Street between Merrill Avenue and Western Avenue.⁸¹ The 1998 Fond du Lac *Yellow Pages* listed forty-eight taverns in the city of Fond du Lac. There were also forty-two liquor-serving restaurants.⁸² These drinking establishments have certainly helped hatch their share of trouble over the years, as police reports indicate, but no doubt thousands of friendships have also been made within the walls of these businesses.

Additionally, there is more packaged beer available now than there ever was in the nineteenth century, when beer was more likely to be tapped into a pail and carried to workplace or home for consumption. There are dozens of beer retailers in the city. A variety of beers are available, and not only at the taverns but in Fond du Lac homes.

⁸⁰ Yenne, *The Field Guide to North American Breweries and Microbreweries*, 58-83.

⁸¹ R.T. Elliott, *Fond du Lac, Past to Present* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin : R.T. Elliott, 1983), 1-5.

⁸² *Ameritech Pages Plus* (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Ameritech Publishing, Inc., 1998), 212-218, 239.

The beer that is drunk in the city has changed. Nobody can be found quaffing a bottle of Schussler's beer or Bechaud's Empire, nor can anyone find a barrel of Sander's or Frey's beer to tap. One cannot even find a beer that is made in Oshkosh today. Ultimately, however, the drinking of beer in Fond du Lac does not revolve around brand names or breweries. Beer consumption is no longer a matter of health or necessity, for water is generally safe to drink in Fond du Lac. On one level, Fond du Lac's love affair with beer is about tradition, and it is about a way of life. The beer drinker is a profound product of human society and history.

The modern beer industry reflects the contemporary times, but the local perspective on beer remains little changed. Even though the choice of beverage may be Coors, Miller Lite, or Michelob instead of Bechaud, local people are still out there, right now, in Fond du Lac's taverns, parks, porches and garages, talking to friends, throwing a ball around, working on cars, listening to the game, or rejoicing at the arrival of the weekend, many with a beer in their hands.

“Castles of Dreams”

Fond du Lac’s Theaters, 1856-2001

Heather Reader

It was a race to the finish. Just one block apart were emerging two buildings the likes of which the people of Fond du Lac had never seen. This was also the last year in which two Fond du Lac newspapers would compete for front-page news.¹ Overall, it was a year of anticipation and excitement. On November 25, 1925, half the wait was over. On a space once comprised of simple downtown shops stood a masterpiece in beaux-arts design called Fischer’s Fond du Lac Theater Beautiful—“A Castle of Dreams.”

One block to the south, crews worked around the clock to prepare for the opening of Fond du Lac’s second great entertainment masterpiece, the Saxe Retlaw Theater and roof garden, on December 26, 1925. The debuts of both theaters were truly grand events. People from as far away as Milwaukee and Chicago made the trip to Fond du Lac to witness the spectacular openings, complete with dedication ceremonies and parades. The opening of the two theaters also marked the beginning of the end of an era of movie palaces. Just four short years later, Fond du Lac and the United States were plunged into economic depression.

Theaters have played an important role in the history and culture of Fond du Lac. They served as a source of entertainment long before radio, televisions, VCRs, and DVD players appeared. Theaters are places in which people from all walks of life can come together for a common purpose. What affected theaters on the national level eventually manifested itself on the local level. Fond du Lac’s theaters reflected the cultural, social and economic changes of their times.

Altogether, there have been twelve theaters in Fond du Lac, including two opera houses and one drive-in movie theater. Nine of the twelve theaters were built between 1856 and 1925. The remaining three opened in the latter half of the 20th century. Other multi-purpose facilities, including Darling’s Hall, built in 1847 on the corner of First and Main Streets; the Coliseum, built in 1906 on the southeast corner of Main and Merrill

¹ In September 1926, the [*Fond du Lac*] *Daily Reporter* and *Daily Commonwealth* newspapers merged to form the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*.

Streets; and Armory E, built in 1890 on the corner of East Second and Portland Streets, also provided similar functions, but they were not used exclusively for theatrical purposes. One key to the proliferation of Fond du Lac theaters was the invention of motion pictures, which led to the opening of nine of the twelve theaters in Fond du Lac. Ultimately, the history of Fond du Lac theaters was shaped largely by this medium. All but two of the theaters and other facilities showed some form of cinema.

Only four years after becoming a city, Fond du Lac obtained its first theater. In 1856, Amory Hall was opened on the west side of Main Street, just north of Sheboygan Street.² Built by the prominent Amory family, it was a beautiful three-story building with a ballroom and a theater on the third floor with seating for 1200 people. It could hold nearly a quarter of Fond du Lac's population at the time, for the 1860 census showed Fond du Lac boasted only 5450 people. For a number of years Amory Hall was hailed by local citizens as the finest building of its kind in Wisconsin.³ The auditorium included a 38-foot dome that arched twelve feet to a skylight. When it was built, it "was regarded as the finest facility of its kind outside of Milwaukee."⁴ In March 1868 the hall was converted into an opera house. A new entrance was added, a circular gallery built, and the stage was made deeper. The original grand staircase was converted into an elite dining area.⁵ With the opening of the Patty House in 1868 on the northeast corner of Main and Sheboygan Streets, a short-lived walkway was built connecting the hotel and the Amory Hall ballroom.⁶ Also in 1868, the world-renowned Tom Thumb and his wife, along with Commodore Nutt and Minnie Warren, visited Fond du Lac twice.⁷ On

² E-mail from Langdon Divers, July 26, 2003. Langdon Divers, born in 1902, is a native of Fond du Lac who has many recollections of the city. He is probably the only person alive in 2005 who has been in all seven of the original movie theaters in Fond du Lac.

³ Maurice McKenna (ed.), *Fond du Lac County Wisconsin Past and Present*. (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Co., 1912).

⁴ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac: Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1991) 116.

⁵ Karen Padley, "Curtain falls for Old-fashioned Theaters," *Fond du Lac Times*, May 25, 1977.

⁶ Ray Thornton, *A Photographer's History of Fond du Lac County* (Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1977), 29. The Patty House was a prominent hotel built on the same site that would become the Retlaw Theater in 1925. The Lewis House that burned down in 1866 preceded the Patty House. The Patty House was renamed the Palmer House by 1890. The walkway was short-lived because it is not in the 1885 photograph on page 26 of *A Photographer's History of Fond du Lac County*.

⁷ Tom Thumb and his wife, Minnie Warren, and Commodore Nutt were entertainers on the vaudeville circuit, famous for the fact that they were midgets. Tom Thumb was "discovered" by world-renowned circus owner and impresario P.T. Barnam.

January 3, 1883, after a few changes, the Opera House reopened as the Grand Opera House, featuring the Royal Hand Bellringers.⁸

According to the 1912 *History of Fond du Lac County*, Amory Hall had been in disuse for many years.⁹ When exactly the building ceased to function as a theater is not clear. The third floor of Amory Hall was destroyed in a fire in September 1937.¹⁰

Also according to the 1912 *History of Fond du Lac County*, a second theater, known as Opera Hall, was built in Fond du Lac in 1865, at the head of Forest Street [now Avenue] on Main Street.¹¹

The third theater in Fond du Lac, the Crescent Opera House, opened on June 7, 1887. It was located on the southeast corner of Second and Marr Streets. Not much was mentioned about the opera house in the newspapers of the time. The first show was “As You Like It” and featured “the renowned Modjeska with her incomparable company.”¹² Nothing is mentioned of the theater’s interior, with the exception of a list of the prominent persons who occupied the upper and lower boxes. A contemporary photograph of the Crescent Opera House depicts a rather plain building, consisting of only a single floor, probably with an elevated roof to accommodate the boxes.¹³ The newspaper, while describing the initial performance, indicated that, “The Opera House was well filled but not crowded, and the audience was made up of first-class citizens.” Many audience members were late to the show because, according to the newspaper, “Fond du Lac people have got into a habit of going late to entertainments.” Many people did not arrive until the second act.¹⁴

Although not constructed as a movie theater, the Crescent Opera House did experiment with showing a few early films in the first decade of the 1900s. Fond du Lac native Langdon Divers recalls: “My folks took me when I was about four and I cried

⁸ Padley.

⁹ McKenna.

¹⁰ Mentzer, 116.

¹¹ McKenna.

¹² “As You Like It,” *The Daily Commonwealth*, Wednesday, June 8, 1887.

¹³ Thornton, 69.

¹⁴ “As You Like It,” *The Daily Commonwealth*, Wednesday, June 8, 1887.

when a car splashed water on the screen and scared me. I can still see the water splash, after 96 years. And there were people all around us.”¹⁵

The Crescent Opera House eventually became the Crescent Auto and Machine Company. There, on the night of September 25, 1908, a fire started that eventually destroyed several surrounding buildings and is now known in Fond du Lac as “the night the churches burned.”¹⁶

The fourth theater built in Fond du Lac was the Idea Theater. Despite what was then described as the worst storm in the history of Fond du Lac, it successfully opened on June 5, 1905. The theater was located at 16-18 West First Street, across the street from what is now the Advocap building. On opening night, the playbill featured mostly vaudeville acts, with the exception of the Edison moving picture panorama (kinodrome)¹⁷ “Travels of a Lost Trunk” consisting of 800 feet of film. The playbill included “Barrington, America’s premier ventriloquist;” “Sisters Bennett, juvenile sketch artists;” “Schaefer and DeCamp, operatic duettists;” “Antonie Vora Goere, a contortionist;”¹⁸ “Carrolton & Hodges, the ‘Ebony Princes;” and “Conway and Rockway, a comic sketch team.” In 1905 admission prices were ten cents for matinees (3:00 p.m.) and fifteen cents for evening performances (7:00 and 9:00 p.m.). Children under twelve were admitted for five cents. The Idea also held a special children’s matinee on Saturday afternoons at 1:30 p.m.¹⁹ New programs were offered every Monday and Thursday. Perhaps the most famous act to play at the Idea came to town in 1912; the legendary comedian Jack Benny performed there when he was only 18 years old.²⁰

Theaters in the early 20th century sought to present themselves as a “high-class” experience. In order to attend, people dressed up and were required to follow rules outlined in the program. Some of these rules included:

¹⁵ E-mail from Langdon Divers, January 13, 2003.

¹⁶ Mentzer, 100-101. Three churches, a school, a residence, and the Crescent Garage were all consumed in the blaze.

¹⁷ A kinodrome was the precursor to modern film. According to Langdon Divers, they were primitive and very jumpy, and were soon “christened” as “flickers.”

¹⁸ This performer was listed in an advertisement that appeared in *The Daily Reporter* of Saturday, June 3, 1905. It appears, however, from a later article that the performance did not take place.

¹⁹ From an advertisement featured in *The Daily Reporter* (Fond du Lac, WI), Saturday, June 3, 1905, 8.

²⁰ Cindy Barden. *Foot of the Lake: An Early History of Fond du Lac, Wisconsin*, (Fond du Lac, Wisconsin: Fond du Lac Public Library Board of Trustees, 1998), 48.

Positively no whistling or stamping.
Positively no smoking.
Ladies and Gentleman will kindly remove their hats.
Positively no objectionable characters will be admitted to any part of this theater.
The management reserves the right to revoke the license of any ticket by returning the purchase price.²¹

The Idea Theater could seat 700 people and was hailed as being “the most complete and compact fire proof and safe vaudeville theater in the state.”²² This was especially important in a time when theater fires were common and many people throughout the United States died in them. Even with extra fire protection, on June 23, 1913, a fire started in the Idea’s projection room after film became stuck in the projector. In less than a minute the metal-lined booth was in flames. Total chaos was avoided, thanks to the quick thinking of manager Paul Spoerke. Once the audience started to panic, upon smelling smoke, Spoerke instructed the orchestra to “play something.” The orchestra played a lively march that restored order, and everyone was able to get out safely.²³

The Idea Theater began showing full-length feature films on March 23, 1911.²⁴ Mr. Langdon Divers remembers the days when actors on the vaudeville circuit performing at the Idea would visit his home:

My father was a conductor on the Chicago and Northwestern Railroad, and became acquainted with the actors coming by train to the Idea for about a 3 or 4 day run. He brought some of them home to meet my mother, to help them with their troubles, like finances, health, and loneliness. Those actors lived out of a trunk, actually, as they went from city to city on the circuit they were in. They missed meals, which were not too good. They were lucky to sleep in a hotel. Sometimes they slept backstage in the theater. It was common for me to come home from school and find a strange woman in the parlor, talking to my mother. I was always introduced and then I would leave them to talk alone. Some would cry. They never looked as nice when talking to my mother as they did in the spot light on the stage. Some of them gave us a free pass to the show.²⁵

²¹ “Vaudeville Entertainers Please Their Audience Monday Night,” *The Daily Reporter*, Tuesday, June 6, 1905, 5.

²² “Idea Theater Opens Tonight,” *The Daily Reporter* Monday, June 5, 1905, 5.

²³ Padley.

²⁴ Thornton, 69.

²⁵ E-mail from Langdon Divers, January 17, 2003.

Idea Theater Advertising and Employees (ca. 1920)

The story of the fifth theater located at 14-18 Sheboygan Street in Fond du Lac is remarkable. In 1905, a local citizens' group was seeking to establish a cultural center for the people of Fond du Lac. The owners of the Crescent Opera House, P.B. Haber and H.R. Potter, proposed a deal that no one could refuse. They promised to close the Crescent and donate \$30,000 toward a new theater, if the citizen group could sell 1000 tickets at \$10 a piece for its opening night.²⁶ Ten dollars was quite a bit of money in those days, considering that admission to the Idea Theater cost only fifteen cents. In sum, a theater costing at least \$40,000 had been promised by the promoters, a sum approximately equivalent to \$800,000 in 2003. To the joy of many, the tickets sold in less than a month. Sidney Lovell, an architect from Chicago, was commissioned to draw up plans for a 70- by 140-foot building, with a 40- by 66-foot stage. The main auditorium measured 60 by 75 feet, enough room to seat 1200 people.

Ninety-six days after the foundation was laid, on January 16, 1906, the Henry Boyle Theater was completed.²⁷ The name "Henry Boyle Theater" was chosen by P.B. Haber and H.R. Potter in appreciation of Henry Boyle, a prominent Fond du Lac yeast company owner and philanthropist who had purchased the land for the theater, located on the site of the old Harrison Postal Bag Company on the corner of Sheboygan and Portland Streets, at a cost of \$8000.²⁸ Boyle also purchased fifty tickets himself and promised yet another \$1000 for terra cotta ornamentation on the front of the building. Upon his arrival at the theater, he and his wife received a long standing ovation that ended only when they took their seats in one of the boxes. Boyle acknowledged the audience with a bow.²⁹

The first stage show to play at the Henry Boyle Theater was "His Grace De Grammont," starring the "highly-acclaimed" actor Otis Skinner.³⁰ The purchasers of the \$10 tickets had the pleasure of meeting Otis Skinner at a seven-course dinner served at the Palmer House, located right across the street on the northeast corner of Main and Sheboygan Streets.

²⁶ Mentzer, 132.

²⁷ Mentzer, 131-133.

²⁸ Padley.

²⁹ "Theater Opened," *The Daily Reporter*, Wednesday, January 17, 1906.

³⁰ Otis Skinner (1858-1942) was a producer, writer, director, and actor on Broadway.

Henry Boyle Theatre (postcard, ca. 1910)

The theater was lavishly decorated, complete with uniformed ushers and candy boys, and a “colored” attendant outside responsible for helping the patrons.³¹ The lavish pink silk dress worn by Mrs. Boyle is now on display at the County Historical Society’s Galloway House and Village, located in Fond du Lac.³²

In 1920, the Henry Boyle Theater closed for remodeling and reopened as the New Garrick on September 5, 1920. According to a Friday, December 4, 1925, *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, plans were finalized for an extensive overhaul of the theater in late 1925 and early 1926. The last changes to the theater occurred in 1945, when it was renamed The Fox. It closed just a few years later and was torn down to make way for a parking lot.³³

The next theater to open was the Royal Theater, located at 50 South Main Street. It opened in September 1908. Advertisements in *The Daily Reporter* claimed that the Royal Theater was the “Home of the Highest Class Picture Plays.”³⁴ Other than advertisements, nothing about the opening of the Royal Theater was mentioned in local newspapers. Langdon Divers recalls the days of the Royal Theater:

The Royal was dingy, dark and made in a hurry, in the days when nickelodeons first came out to show the first movies. About 1911 my aunt Josephine took me to the old dark Royal and the floor was not flat, it had a dark step where she tripped, fell, and sued, and won for her injuries.³⁵

The court’s judgment may have been a substantial one, for the Royal soon closed for extensive remodeling.

On Saturday, August 16, 1913, after a series of improvements had been completed, the Royal reopened as the Orpheum. The first improvement made was the lowering of the floor to street level, thus dealing with the source of Langdon Divers’ aunt’s lawsuit. A new electric system was also added with all wires running inside conduit. The projection operating room was lined with fireproof asbestos and metal, which also made it sound proof. Decorations included extensive stucco-work, crystal lights suspended from the ceiling by bronze ornaments complete with oscillating electric

³¹ “Theater Opened,” *The Daily Reporter*, Wednesday, January 17, 1906.

³² Padley.

³³ Mentzer, 131-133.

³⁴ *The Daily Reporter*, Monday, May 1, 1911, 8.

fans, and six bowl-shaped chandeliers. The use of an indirect lighting system produced a light bright enough for reading, but the illumination did not affect the movie screen. A large electric sign with the word “Orpheum” was used to light the lobby. The addition of a three-foot suction fan provided “perfect ventilation” within the theater. Finally, a new orchestra was hired, under the direction of Mr. George Awe, “to play the pictures.”³⁶ All in all, the Orpheum was far nicer and better equipped than its predecessor, the Royal.³⁷ According to an August 25, 1913, article in the *The Reporter*, Fond du Lac was then the proud owner of “the classiest little theater in the state . . . a perfect motion picture house.” Its program consisted of only the “highest quality pictures,” including Jack London’s *The Sea Wolf*, and Jesse L. Lasky’s *Civilian Clothes*, starring Thomas Meighan.

On Saturday, December 4, 1909, Fond du Lac saw the opening of another nickelodeon, the Bijou, located at 104 South Main Street (the old Penny Arcade).³⁸ An article in *The [Fond du Lac] Daily Commonwealth* stated that the new theater had a handsome lobby, finished in mahogany and cream, with seating for 250 to 300 people.³⁹ Advertisements boasted “fine motion pictures” and “No Flicker in Our Pictures.” Like the other theaters in Fond du Lac, the Bijou originally showed motion pictures intermixed with vaudeville acts.

The Bijou was relocated to 90-92 South Main Street and reopened as a motion picture theater on May 6, 1911, boasting one of only two “mirror screens” in the state.⁴⁰ The building in which it was located still exists today, just north of the northwest corner of Main and First Streets.

According to Karen Padley, the 1910s in Fond du Lac proved to be a rocky time for theaters. Playbills switched from stage presentations to vaudeville, then to movies, and back again. The Henry Boyle Theater changed ownership several times, once even being owned by Boyle himself. Admission also increased to 22 cents.

³⁵ E-mail from Langdon Divers, January 19, 2003.

³⁶ “Many Features at New Orpheum,” *The Reporter*, Monday, August 25, 1913, 3.

³⁷ “New Orpheum Modern House,” *The Reporter*, Friday, August 15, 1913, 3.

³⁸ “Nickelodeon” was the name given to movie theaters in the early 20th century that charged five cents for admission. In the case of the Bijou, afternoon performances were five cents.

³⁹ *The Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, December 2, 1909.

⁴⁰ A mirror screen was made up of millions of tiny lenses that would reflect more light than previous film screen technologies, improving the overall picture quality.

At this same time, theater designs were improving. Including fewer seats allowed more room, and eliminating obstructions in the form of pillars created better sight lines. Movie technology also improved. At the national level, film companies scrambled for ways to make steadier pictures and eliminate the jumpiness that resulted in the name “flickers” being applied to their products. Movie theaters such as the Bijou advertised “No Flicker to Our Pictures.”⁴¹ By 1913, many film companies were experimenting with color through a process of tinting each frame individually with blue, amber, and red. A blue tint was used for night scenes, amber for sunlight, and red for large fires.⁴² In 1913, Thomas Edison developed the Kinetophone. Early advertisements for the Kinetophone touted its advantages:

Talking Pictures. A Fact! A Reality! Thos. A. Edison startles the civilized world and revolutionizes the picture business with his latest and greatest invention the KINETOPHONE, absolutely the first practical talking picture ever made.

Although the Kinetophone proved to be a failure in theatrical use, due to bad sound quality and volume, this technology paved the way for “talkies.”⁴³ Music and sound effects were improved with the construction and installation of more versatile organs that could play a wide range of sounds. To further expand the appeal of movies, film companies began to make postcards and souvenirs that could be purchased at the theater. Magazines such as *Motion Picture Story Magazine* and *Photoplay* were also published to increase public interest.

As movie technology improved, more and more people began going to the cinema. This increase in the theater-going population, and the consequent enhanced profitability of their product, more theaters would be built. This trend was apparent in Fond du Lac, where five new movie theaters opened during an eight-year period from 1905 to 1913. Most movie theaters took great pride in being clean, comfortable, orderly, and attentive to the audience, characteristics especially important to the families they sought to attract.

⁴¹ *The Reporter*, Wednesday, February 17, 1909, 8.

⁴² David Robinson, *From Peep Show to Palace: The Birth of American Film* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), 165.

⁴³ Robinson, 166.

By the early 1920s, theaters were also opening in smaller towns throughout Fond du Lac County. The Rex Theatre opened in North Fond du Lac, the New Opera House in Campbellsport, Daehn's Opera House in Fairwater, Schmidkofer Nicholas in Mt. Calvary, The New Opera House in St. Cloud, The Auditorium in Ripon, and both the Davison and the Scenic Theater in Waupun.⁴⁴

Dramatic changes in ownership and consolidation of Fond du Lac theaters took place in 1925. The Fond du Lac Theater Company, controlled by M.D. Thomas and a Mr. Braun of Iron Mountain, Michigan, which had owned the Orpheum, Bijou, Idea, and Garrick, was acquired by W.L. Ainsworth and F. R. Smith of Fond du Lac.⁴⁵

Competition in the construction of theaters became a matter of great community interest. The next two theaters in Fond du Lac were built in the atmosphere of a media event that turned out to be a race to the finish. The Fischer's Fond du Lac Theater ultimately won, opening on November 25, 1925. The Saxe Retlaw Theater opened a month later, on December 26, 1925.

The Fond du Lac Theater, located at 27-29 North Main Street, was by all accounts a masterpiece of its genre. Touted as Fond du Lac's first "movie palace," it was built by Fischer Theater Company (Fischer-Paramount Theaters) in the Beaux Arts style of the time, featuring ornate terra cotta decoration on the exterior. What made this type of architecture unusual was that generally a building in this style was not located in a downtown environment.⁴⁶

Three characteristics were typical of the interior design of theaters in this period. First, the interior had to stimulate the imagination to quicken the spirit of romance. Second, the interior had to make the theater patron comfortable. Finally, the theater needed to put the audience in a happy frame of mind and hold its interest during intermissions. The overall purpose of theater was entertainment for the public, a place where they could live for an hour or two in a land of make-believe and romance.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ *Wright's City and County Directory of Fond du Lac*, (Milwaukee: A. G. Wright, 1921).

⁴⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, Friday, December 4, 1925.

⁴⁶ *Historic Houses Survey Macy-N. Main*, on file at the Fond du Lac Public Library.

⁴⁷ Robert Sexton and B.F. Betts, *American Theatres of Today*, (New York: Architectural Book Pub. Co., 1927, Reprint 1977).

The planning and decoration of the Fond du Lac Theater effectively fulfilled all three of these criteria, and the builders spared no expense in accomplishing their purpose. Everything in the theater was considered to be state-of-the-art, including a ventilation system capable of an early form of air-conditioning during the hot summer months. Air conditioning was achieved by pulling air through cooling chambers located in the basement, then pushing it through washing chambers where the air was filtered, sterilized and cooled to 60 degrees. By the time the air reached the auditorium through a mushroom system, the air temperature was approximately 65 degrees. More than four railroad carloads of plaster were needed for the ornamentation of the theater. The Architectural Decorating Company of Chicago used only the best plaster and most talented workmen. The entire theater was carpeted, including the restrooms and lounges, at a cost of \$6000. Construction utilized 300,000 feet of the finest grade lumber.⁴⁸

For the exterior of a theater, the book *American Theatres of Today* states that the facade must have a theatrical appearance that is in pleasing contrast to the commercial surroundings of the building in order to evoke a spirit of romance. Elaborately decorated with terra cotta ornamentation and featuring a huge electric sign, the Fond du Lac Theater certainly fulfilled these requirements. The Electric sign on the front of the building, spelling out “Fischer’s Fond du Lac Theater,” was similar to the sign on the Chicago Theater in the windy city. Costing an estimated \$7500, it was the largest sign on any theater in the entire state of Wisconsin, and one of the largest in the country. The sign measured fifty feet high from the canopy covering the sidewalk to a point above the cornice of the building. It contained 794 twenty-five watt light bulbs in its three-foot letters, 672 fifteen-watt light bulbs in the flashing border, and weighed two tons. The total cost of the Fischer Fond du Lac Theater in 1925 was estimated to be \$750,000, the equivalent of \$7,731,958 in the money of 2003. To further accentuate the lavish and elaborately decorated interior and exterior, all the ushers and doormen wore uniforms consisting of tan cutaway coats trimmed with gold, black dress vests, deep maroon trousers with gold braid stripes, and round maroon caps trimmed in gold.

⁴⁸ Theatrical Section, *The Daily Commonwealth* Wednesday, November 25, 1925. All material concerning the interior, exterior, and opening ceremonies for the building comes from this source.

The theater itself was capable of seating 2000 people, 1500 on the main floor and 500 in the mezzanine and balcony. The balcony, which curved around the theater, was designed using a cantilever system so that there were no obstructions to the sight lines. Interestingly, all the seats in the theater were upholstered in solid leather and were air cushioned. Also featured was a \$40,000 Barton Organ situated on an elevator capable of raising the organ to a visible height. The orchestra pit was large enough to contain a complete orchestra. As with most theaters at the time, newspapers claimed the Fond du Lac Theater to be solidly fireproof.

Only “top shows” from the Famous Players Lasky Corporation, producers of Paramount Pictures, were to be presented. Paramount Pictures featured many of the best-known stars at the time including Gloria Swanson, Rudolph Valentino, Thomas Meighan, Richard Dix, Leatrice Joy, and Adolph Menjou, among many others. Some famous directors working for Paramount including D.W. Griffith, thought to be the father of American film, James Cruze, and Monta Bell. Some of the early shows promised to Fond du Lac patrons on the day of the opening included *The Ten Commandments*, *The Freshman*, *The Pony Express*, and *The Covered Wagon*. Miss Paramount herself, Gladys Ralston, was the hostess for the grand opening festivities. Vaudeville acts, musicians, and special events were also featured.

The grand opening of the Fischer’s “Theater Beautiful,” as it was called, was truly a gala event. The opening was preceded by a parade down Main Street featuring Miss Paramount, the newly crowned Miss Fond du Lac, Mayor Haentze, city officials, directors of Fischer Theaters Company, theatrical stars, the American Legion Drum Corps, and other local notables.

Sadly, the Fond du Lac Theater closed in the mid-1980s, after repairs became too costly. In 1989 it was demolished and replaced by a parking ramp. Although the theater itself is gone, the surrounding building, which once housed the lobby and still houses several storefronts and apartments, remains. What was formerly the entrance and lobby of the Fond du Lac Theater is now a shop, “Victoria’s.”

The Retlaw Theater, located at 23 South Main Street, opened almost exactly one month after the Fond du Lac Theater, on December 26, 1925. Financed by prominent

businessman Walter Schroeder of Wisconsin Hotel Realty company, who had built the Retlaw Hotel (Retlaw is Walter spelled backward) a few years earlier. The Retlaw was a masterpiece in art deco design by Chicago architects George L. and C.W. Rapp. It was built by Immel Construction Company of Fond du Lac, with the John F. Ahern Company, also of Fond du Lac, responsible for the plumbing, heating, and ventilation systems. The theater was owned and operated by Saxe Amusement Enterprises. At the time, the Retlaw was the largest single-floor theater in Wisconsin and featured the only roof garden outside of the city of Milwaukee.

The roof garden, capable of accommodating 2500 couples, was an open-air, 8000-square-foot, maple dance floor located, as its name suggests, on the top floor of the building. The facility was finished in stained rough lumber with a ceiling of beams and artistic latticework, along with a multitude of lights on the ceiling and along the walls. The dance floor was mounted on thousands of tiny springs in order to provide some “give” to prevent dancers from becoming fatigued. The wood in the floor was constructed in such a way that dancers would move in the direction in which the flooring was laid.

First rate orchestras and bands played in the roof garden. When all the windows were flung open, it was said that music filled the streets of the city. An elaborate lounge was located on the second floor, where couples could check their coats and later return to have a drink at the soda fountain, smoke, and relax. At the time of the Retlaw’s opening the Saxe Amusement Enterprises, the group that ran the Retlaw, also operated roof gardens in Milwaukee (Modjeska Roof), Minneapolis (Marigold Gardens), and planned to open another in Racine (Racine Roof).⁴⁹ The roofs were open for dancing on Tuesday, Thursday, Saturday, and Sunday evenings at an admission price of fifty cents for ladies and seventy-five cents for gentlemen. Work on the roof garden began on December 3, 1925, just 22 days before its opening. In order to finish on time, crews worked 24 hours a day. The Retlaw Roof was finished in 20 days.

Instead of decorating in the typical “movie palace style” of the times, the Retlaw’s decorations resembled an early version of art deco, including straighter lines and less

⁴⁹ *The Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, Saturday, December 12, 1925.

ornate plaster, but the interior was still lavish. The theater was decorated with handsome drapes, chandeliers, exit and aisle lights, and included 1140 opera chairs complete with padded leather backs and upholstered leather spring seats. All rows of seats were curved so that every seat directly faced the stage. The auditorium measured 96 by 81 feet, and the proscenium opening was 22 feet high and 48 feet wide, covered in red and gold velvet curtains.⁵⁰ The stage was actually designed to be smaller than typical stages built at the time, due to recognition that the novel idea of “moving pictures” might actually catch on, but in case movies failed as a theatrical experiment, both the Retlaw and the Fond du Lac Theater could easily be converted back to “legitimate” theater. Included on the stage were several hand-painted scenery backdrops, a couple of which were still to be found in the former Retlaw as recently as 2003. The Retlaw also featured disappearing footlights and border lights that were recessed into the front of the stage and therefore did not block the lines of sight of the audience. A light panel consisting of several levers and switches and located at the east end of the stage controlled all the lights. The panel continued to be operational in 2003.

Music for performances was to be played on a “Golden tone” Barton organ built specially for the Retlaw Theater by Bartola Musical Instrument Company of Oshkosh, Wisconsin, at a cost of \$30,000, or approximately \$316,000 in 2003 money. The organ was capable of producing a wide range of sounds from thunder to birds chirping, and it supplied the sound effects and background music for early silent films. This organ was eventually sold to an individual in Chicago who displays it in a home behind glass. The total cost of the Retlaw in 1925 was \$600,000, or approximately \$6,315,000 in the money of 2003.

A stairway to the west of the foyer leads down to “commodious retirement and toilet rooms for women, where furnishings and fittings are most elaborate, with marble porcelain used freely and with good effect from the standpoints of both beauty and sanitation.”⁵¹ Similarly a stairway at the east end of the foyer leads down to the men’s smoking room and toilets.

⁵⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, Saturday, December 26, 1925.

⁵¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, Saturday, December 26, 1925.

The exterior of the building is decorated in terra cotta. The sign that once read “Saxe Retlaw” was purposely placed off center, because this asymmetry was the trademark of architects George L. and C.W. Rapp.

The opening program was certainly diversified. Highlights included the photoplay “Classified,” starring Corinne Griffith. Other acts included the overture “Orpheus,” directed by Rudolph G. Kopp of the Wisconsin Theater Concert Orchestra; a newsreel with a story about the court-martial of General “Billy” Mitchell of Wisconsin; “A Japanese Print,” with Miss Miriam Klein, soprano; Novelty Scenic “Dancing” (Personification of Joy); a song called “Home Again,” played on the theater organ; a stage presentation “A Melody Painting;” and the comedy “Batchellor Babies.”[sic]⁵²

In 1932, the Saxe Retlaw Theater was purchased by 20th Century Fox. Due to the impact of the Great Depression and the rising costs of vaudeville acts, the Retlaw converted to present only films in 1935. As movie technology improved, content of the film tended to appeal more to a more diverse clientele. In many cases in depression-era films, “the audience was reassured by being shown that money does not bring happiness and (in Lewis Jacobs’ words) ‘it is better to be poor and good than rich and wicked.’”⁵³

Many of the economic problems that led to the Great Depression were being experienced long before the stock market crash of 1929, and this was especially true for agriculture in the United States. Rural poverty, coupled with the fact that too many theaters had been opened too rapidly, diluting revenues in smaller cities, led to the collapse of the theater business. By 1930, only three of the eight theaters in Fond du Lac were still open, The New Garrick, the Retlaw, and the Fond du Lac. These were also the three largest theaters in Fond du Lac. The same pattern occurred elsewhere, due to the fact that supplying smaller theaters became too costly for film companies, because they required more frequent program changes, sometimes three times a week, in order to keep people buying tickets. Larger cities could run the same film for two or more weeks and still make a profit.⁵⁴

⁵² Advertisement in *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, Saturday, December 26, 1925.

⁵³ Robinson, 70.

⁵⁴ Michael Putnam, *Silent screens: The Decline and Transformation of the American Movie Theater*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2000).

The Great Depression didn't stop everyone from going to the movies. In hard times, films became a means of self-therapy, "a dreamlike escape from the often quietly desperate lives a great many people lived."⁵⁵ Film companies and movie producers continued to introduce new technology. The most significant technological breakthrough, developed in 1922, was known as Two-Color Technicolor. It was used in special sequences within black and white films, and at the time it was thought that color might alleviate the stress and depression many people experienced. In the 1930s, three-color Technicolor was developed by Walt Disney and used in his animated films. The first feature-length motion picture to use this technique was *Becky Sharp* (1935) directed by Rouben Mamoulian. Probably the next most famous film to use three-color Technicolor was *Gone With the Wind* (1939) directed by Victor Fleming. Interestingly, *Gone With the Wind* was also the first film for which concessions were sold in movie theaters. When *Gone With the Wind* played at the Retlaw in 1940, the Retlaw was the first movie theater in Fond du Lac, and one of the first in the nation, to provide such concessions. Theater employees borrowed a picnic table and tablecloths from the Retlaw Hotel and sold Coca-Cola for ten cents a cup. At the time, it was very much looked down upon to eat popcorn in a theater, because popcorn wasn't considered to be dignified food. Eating popcorn or candy in a theater was "reserved only for the burlesque houses in Milwaukee."⁵⁶

Another process that emerged during the Great Depression was sound. The first official "talkie," *The Jazz Singer*, starring Al Jolson, was introduced in October 1927, at a time when radio shows were threatening silent movie attendance. *The Jazz Singer* was primarily a silent film, but it included approximately 280 spoken and sung words. Select audiences on the East and West coasts were captivated when they heard "Wait a minute, you ain't heard nothing yet!" the legendary line that changed the motion picture industry forever. Nevertheless, it was not until the 1930s that the larger theaters, in small cities, such as the Fischer Fond du Lac and the Retlaw, were able to adapt to present sound films, mostly due to the expense of the new technology at a time when money was tight.

⁵⁵ Putnam, 29.

⁵⁶ Nick P. Frank interview by Lee Reinsch in "Retlaw Goes Down with the 'Titanic,'" *The Reporter*, April 16, 1998.

A 1948 U.S. Supreme Court ruling in a massive anti-trust suit eventually had an enormous effect on theater ownership in Fond du Lac. According to the Court's ruling, film production companies could no longer own or operate their own theaters. It took almost ten years for the ruling to be fully implemented, but as a result, a Fond du Lac man by the name of Nick P. Frank, realized a lifelong dream. Frank took over ownership of the Retlaw Theater after the film companies were at last forced to divest themselves of their theater holdings in 1958. Frank bought the theater from Walter Schroeder in 1962 and eventually built one of the largest theater chains in Wisconsin. He had started at the Retlaw working cleanup in 1933, became an usher in 1936, and eventually rose to the position of manager, leaving from 1942-1946 to join the U.S. Army during the Second World War. Along with his sons, Alan and Dennis, he eventually owned the Fond du Lac Theater, built Cinemas I & II in 1973, and built the Fond du Lac Theaters in 1998.⁵⁷

In 1984, the Retlaw was divided into a triplex, with three screens in separate auditoriums, and in 1985 two more theaters were added at the back of the building. Great care was taken by the Frank family to preserve the original fixtures during these alterations. The walls that were added to divide the original theater were built in such a way that they could be removed with little damage to the original structure.

The Retlaw Theater finally "went down with the Titanic," its last feature film, closing April 16, 1998, following the opening of the brand new Fond du Lac Theaters, a multiplex located on the west edge of Fond du Lac.⁵⁸ In an era of rapid technological innovations, the Retlaw could no longer accommodate devices such as Dolby Surround Sound or meet the increasing demand for convenient parking. Upkeep and maintenance of the Retlaw were also becoming too costly. These were the same reasons that had caused the Frank family to close the Fond du Lac Theater a decade earlier. In fact, the Franks initially closed the Retlaw from about 1975 until 1984, hoping to keep the Fond du Lac Theater going. Unfortunately, deterioration of its plaster caused by the primitive air-conditioning system made repairs far too costly, and the theater became a safety risk. It was therefore decided that the Fond du Lac would be closed instead of the Retlaw.

⁵⁷ Information from an unpublished typescript recollection provided by Alan Frank on behalf of his father, Nick P. Frank.

⁵⁸ The film *Titanic* was the last film played at the Retlaw Theater.

This was ironic, considering that in 1925 the theaters had raced neck in neck to be the first to open. A half-century later, the fates of the two theaters were again intertwined, with the Retlaw this time victorious in outlasting its erstwhile competitor.⁵⁹

The Retlaw Theater and surrounding buildings were sold once again to Shelly Stayer, LLC, in August 2000, at a price of \$415,000.⁶⁰ The building was renamed Bravo Performing Arts Center and housed a children's theater, a dinner theater, a dance studio, offices, and an upscale restaurant and bar. July 2001 saw the first live production performed in the Retlaw since 1935.⁶¹

As new movie theaters were built in Fond du Lac and elsewhere in the United States, a shift toward family-oriented experience took place. Originally, theaters had worked hard to project their offerings as aimed at patrons who were different from those who might have attended burlesque or other questionable entertainments. According to frequent advertisements, "objectionable" people were not accepted in theaters. A June 8, 1887, article in *The Daily Commonwealth* about the opening of the Crescent Opera House stated, "the audience was made up of first-class citizens." An article in the June 6, 1905, edition of *The Daily Reporter* stated one of the rules for the Idea Theater as "Positively no objectionable characters will be admitted to any part of this theater." It seems probable that the theater wished patrons to assume that a person who appeared disreputable might not be allowed to see a show at the Idea. By 1925, with the openings of the Fond du Lac and Retlaw Theaters, a shift, at least in the language of advertising, is evident. Both builders of the two theaters dedicated their theaters to the people of Fond du Lac without drawing any social distinctions.

By the Second World War, movie content was also becoming more family-friendly. Social problems were not often addressed. Instead, movies taught that "social and personal happiness revolved around love, marriage, and the family. Marital fidelity and parental respect were rules that could not be broken without

⁵⁹ Alan Frank interview, June 27, 2002.

⁶⁰ Courtesy of Fond du Lac County Assessors Office. In 1925, the Retlaw Theater was built at a cost of \$600,000, an amount equivalent to \$6,315,000 in 2003.

⁶¹ Frank Scotello, "Theater Returns to Live Performances After 65 Years," *The Reporter*, July 10, 2001.

disastrous consequences. Wickedness was consistently punished and virtue was rewarded. However moralistic, films were optimistic.”⁶²

This shift to more family-oriented themes emerged in large part as a reaction against burlesque that developed in the United States between the First and Second World Wars. Originating around the 1860s, burlesque entertainment was a combination of vaudeville and the older minstrel show. Presentations often involved vulgar themes, sexual humor, and strip tease. As the popularity of film and radio increased, the appeal of burlesque began to diminish. Cinemas were careful in their advertising to distinguish themselves from this “lower class” entertainment.

The rise of an “automotive culture” resulted in the opening of a new and different type of theater in Fond du Lac in 1950. On June 21, the Lake Park Outdoor Theater held its informal opening. Located just northwest of the intersection of Main and Scott Streets, the theater was designed to resemble a six-story colonial-style house. The tower that held the movie screen measured 54 feet wide and 75 feet high, with the movie screen measuring 36 by 50 feet. The theater could accommodate 510 cars, with an additional space in which 300 cars were able to wait for the second show.

The Lake Park Outdoor Theater opened at a time when patronage to traditional movie theaters was sharply declining as a result of the development of television and the fear of contracting serious diseases. Polio, especially, which often resulted in permanent paralysis or death, kept people away from public places. Many people chose to stay home and watch television, because of the fear of being in large groups, and also because they had no need to dress up or find a babysitter. What made Lake Park unusual was that it featured a children’s playground and a baby service department that provided bottles, nipples, formula, milk, diapers, and free bottle warming service to parents of baby boomers. Many of the advertisements boasted phrases like “No Need to Dress Up” and “We love your children so bring them to our new FREE kiddies’ playground.” The development of the outdoor theater saw a shift back to family outings to the movies, where the whole family could sit in the comfort of the family car, just at a time when record numbers of Americans could afford automobiles.

⁶² Robinson, 170.

The entertainment chosen was also selected with the family in mind. In addition to the movie, a short comedy, a color cartoon and a newsreel were shown. The first movie shown at Lake Park Outdoor Theater was *The Nevadan* starring Randolph Scott. Also showing the first night were a 20-minute comedy entitled *Uninvited Blonde*, a Mighty Mouse cartoon, a Terrytoon called *Mrs. Jones' Best Farm*, and the News of the World. The total cost of the theater was \$120,000, or about \$916,000 in 2003 money.

Despite the management's best efforts to present the Outdoor Theater as a family-oriented business, others in Fond du Lac viewed it quite differently. The mix of entertainments shown changed rapidly from the initial types of films presented, and it soon gained the nickname "The Passion Pit." Monsignor Riordan, Pastor of St. Joseph's Parish, condemned the drive-in theater in his homilies and threatened to exclude those who attended its shows from the sacraments.⁶³ Lake Park Outdoor Theater closed in 1983.

The development of newer technologies ultimately resulted in the decline of traditional movie theaters. The years immediately following the Second World War saw the take-off of television, and there was no going back. By 1950, there were 100 television stations and 4,000,000 television sets in the United States.⁶⁴ Fewer people were leaving their homes to go to movie theaters. To combat this trend, film companies continued to improve the colorization of movies in order to compete with the black and white television sets. Color televisions were introduced in 1954, but color TV took years to catch on, because the sets were very expensive and the quality of color in early sets was often quite poor. The advent of home air-conditioning was also responsible for the decreasing theater patronage. After the Second World War, inexpensive, mass produced air conditioners became commonplace in homes. This meant that people no longer needed to seek out air-conditioned theaters to find relief from hot and humid days.⁶⁵ In response to these new technologies, some theaters remodeled in hopes of attracting a new audience, and of course the drive-in evolved. In Fond du Lac, the New Garrick closed,

⁶³ Father Ron Jansch, OFM Cap., interview, April 25, 2003.

⁶⁴ Jack Ellis, *A History of Film*, (New Jersey: Prentice Hall, Inc., 1979), 376.

⁶⁵ Susanna Robbins, "Keeping Things Cool: Air-Conditioning in the Modern World." *Organization of American Historians Magazine of History*, October 2003, XVIII: 43.

was remodeled, and reopened as the Fox in 1945. In 1950, the Lake Park Outdoor Theater opened.

Cinerama wide screen projections and 3D films were both theatrical experiments of 1952. The first 3D films attracted much attention due to their novelty, but the public interest did not last long, as viewers complained of eyestrain and disliked wearing the 3D glasses that were necessary to resolve screen images. Cinerama wide screen projection proved to be more successful, but the technology was limited by the physical requirements of the theaters and the relative scarcity of films produced for this medium.

The postwar boom of suburban shopping centers and the decline of “Main Street America” ultimately led to the demise of many downtown movie theaters.⁶⁶ This trend held true in Fond du Lac as well. Starting in the 1970s, businesses began to move to the area known to many Fond du Lac natives as “the strip,” the area of West Johnson Street extending westward from Hickory Street past the U.S. Highway 41 overpass. Many downtown businesses either relocated to this area or closed as a result of competition from shopping complexes such as Forest Mall, Wal-Mart, and Pick ‘n Save. When the Retlaw finally closed, it was as if the energy had been sucked out of the downtown area, and evening activities in the downtown were left to the exclusive possession of the many area bars and taverns.

The 1980s saw the emergence of multiplexes, or multiple screen movie theaters, usually located on the outskirts of towns where space for building was available and property taxes might be lower. In these new theaters, it was possible to go to one location and still choose from a wide variety of films instead of driving to a different theater for each film. Parking was also no longer an issue at these peripheral sites, and this was a major reason for their relocation in an era when Americans typically felt lost without their automobiles. The Retlaw became a triplex in 1984, a fiveplex in 1985, and it closed in 1998 to make way for an eight-screen complex located beyond the western edge of Fond du Lac.

The 1980s also saw yet another revolution in home entertainment, the emergence of the Video Cassette Recorder, first sold in the Betamax format and later in the VHS

⁶⁶ Putnam.

format. Along with the VCR technology came the development of video stores, expanding the choice of films available for play at home almost limitlessly. Ironically, in Fond du Lac, one of the many video stores opened on the same land that had once held the Lake Park Outdoor Theater. Fond du Lac may have been one of the first cities in Wisconsin with a video-rental store. The first one to open in the city was located at the corner of Sheboygan and Main Streets in one of the Retlaw storefronts. Patrons of these stores could choose among hundreds of films to view in the comfort and privacy of their own homes, and this in turn fueled a new market for films that were too explicit in violence, language, or sexuality to be profitable to show in movie theaters. Video rentals were also much cheaper than tickets to the cinema. The development of VCRs also permitted people to record their favorite television programs to be watched at a later time. This capability further lessened motivation to go to theaters for entertainment. Availability of cable television and satellite transmission of programs to individual homes greatly increased the array and variety of programming that was available. Finally, the 1990s saw the emergence of the DVD player, which only reinforced the impact of the VCRs. None of these developments provided much encouragement for theater owners.

Of the twelve theaters that have been a part of Fond du Lac's history and culture, only three survive today. Two of the three surviving theaters, both relatively recently built multiplex facilities located in the shopping district on the western edge of Fond du Lac, show films on a regular basis. The third theater, the old Retlaw, the only remaining downtown theater, has been converted to other purposes and is the last of the city theaters that was built in the first quarter of the twentieth century, the golden era of the cinema palace. Sadly, the sites of three of the theaters, the Idea, the Fond du Lac, and the Henry Boyle, are now all occupied by parking lots, a mute commentary on the decline of downtown Fond du Lac as a center for civic entertainment. The multiplex trend that developed in the 1980s is only likely to continue. Theaters across the United States will probably continue to grow in size, and technology will continue to improve. The few historic downtown film theaters that still function will probably gradually cease to exist. Fortunately, some of these traditional theaters in Wisconsin, like the Grand Opera House in Oshkosh and the Sheboygan Theater, have been rescued and restored to their original

grandeur as venues for live performances. Others, not so happily, will likely become taverns, thrift shops, children's museums, and restaurants. In Fond du Lac, and elsewhere in America, theaters grew, evolved, and disappeared reflecting the tastes, technology, aspirations, and culture of the times, and the character and uses of the theaters continue to provide a useful insight into the values and interests of a community.

Chronology of Fond du Lac Theaters

1856: Amory Hall Burned in 1937	444-448 South Main Street
1887: Crescent Opera House Burned in 1908	S.E. corner of E. Second and Marr Streets
1905: Idea Theater Closed circa 1924 ⁶⁷	16-18 W. First Street
1906: Henry Boyle Theater 1920: Reopened as the New Garrick 1945: Reopened as the Fox Closed circa 1956	14-18 Sheboygan Street
1908: Royal Theater 1913: Reopened as the Orpheum Closed circa 1929	50 S. Main Street
1909: Bijou Closed circa 1927	90-92 S. Main Street
1925: Fischer's Fond du Lac Theater Closed 1984	27-29 N. Main Street
1925: Saxe's Retlaw Theater 1932: Renamed the Fox Retlaw 1958: Renamed the Retlaw 1984-5 Remodeled as Multiplex Closed 1998 2001: Reopened as Bravo Performing Arts Center	23 S. Main Street
1950: Lake Park Outdoor Theater Closed circa 1983	51 W. Scott Street
1973: Cinema I & II In operation as of 2005	755 W. Johnson Street (Forest Mall)
1998: Fond du Lac Theaters In operation as of 2005	1131 W. Scott Street

⁶⁷ Approximate closing dates were determined by referencing *Wright's Fond du Lac City Directory*, 1887-1989. Directories were published biennially until 1965. Since 1965, they have been published annually.

**Something to do in Fond du Lac:
Public Leisure Activities in the 1920s
Todd Louis Whittaker**

In the 1920s, post-World War I America saw a major shift of thought, ideals, and patterns of life. Fond du Lac, like most of the rest of the country, participated fully in these changes. Many alterations in the fabric of life were stimulated by the spread of new technology. The automobile and its associated infrastructure was the most obvious of these transformations, but changes in the technology of entertainment, especially the film industry, were also significant, as better methods of projection and sound were introduced to theaters. Modernization and technology played an integral part in the shaping of leisure activities in Fond du Lac, as is evident from the large numbers of people who were able to attend public events in a relatively small town of 23,427, and from the frequent renovation and new construction of cinemas.¹

The post-war decade brought many Americans higher wages and a shorter workweek. This meant that people had more money to spend on various leisure activities and more time to enjoy them. Between the World War I and the Great Depression, the average number of Wisconsin wage earners who worked 54 hours a week or more declined from nearly 140,000 at the beginning of the period to fewer than 85,000 at the end, and the number who worked at least 60 hours dropped from more than 75,000 to fewer than 25,000.²

More hours free from labor and more disposable income were accompanied by significant social changes and shifting cultural attitudes. Both men and women were affected by the changes in American life, but women experienced the greater transformations, as increasing numbers felt free to venture beyond the home and enjoy previously forbidden or inaccessible pleasures. Younger women drank, although it was illegal during Prohibition. Some smoked cigarettes, dressed in revealing clothing, engaged in pre-marital sex, and generally affected an air of sophistication.³ Many more

¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 28, 1970.

² Paul W Glad, *The History of Wisconsin, v. V: War, a New Era, and Depression 1914-1940*, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1990), 248-9.

³ Peter Jennings and Todd Brewster, *The Century*, (New York: ABC News, 1998), 115.

women were visibly using cosmetics. Women's clothing changed. Skirts became much shorter than they had been before. A popular trend was for women to wear their hair shorter.⁴ Women also wore high-heeled shoes, much to the dismay of the medical profession, which held that wearing these shoes would lead to uteral displacement and represented a threat to the birth rate.⁵ Young women also rolled their stockings below their knees, revealing their shinbones and kneecaps.⁶

How much of this change in behavior affected women in Fond du Lac is difficult to judge from newspapers accounts. Certainly fashions changed. Fond du Lac women may also have led the nation in attending boxing, hitherto a male-only spectator sport, and some Fond du Lac women began to smoke in public.

The 1920s represented a period of relative wealth and excitement for the city of Fond du Lac. A remarkable number of leisure activities and entertainments were available in this small Midwest town. Theaters dotted Main Street, and circuses frequently passed through the city, performing to sold-out crowds of people under "the big top." Balls and dances were common events, and concerts in the park provided free entertainment, featuring the City Band, under the direction of Joseph Prindl.⁷

The city of Fond du Lac developed a remarkable variety of sporting entertainments. Perhaps the city's biggest sporting dream in the 1920s was the hope that negotiations with the New York Yankees could bring this famous professional team to Fond du Lac to play an exhibition game against a local baseball team. The deal fell through, however, and Babe Ruth and the Yankees never did play in Fond du Lac. Despite this disappointment, the game of baseball remained a big hit in the city. Another sport that was popular in Fond du Lac was boxing. Thousands gathered at Armory "E" to see "the best boxing action that could be seen for miles around."

There were also traditional unorganized entertainments. Children in Fond du Lac enjoyed visiting the local swimming hole near the lake and spending the afternoon in the

⁴ Robert Graves, and Alan Hodge, *The Long Weekend: A Social History of Great Britain, 1918-1939*, (N.Y.: W.W. Norton Co., 1963, 2nd ed.), 39.

⁵ Graves and Hodge, 41.

⁶ Frederick Lewis Allen, *Only Yesterday: An Informal History of the Nineteen-Twenties*, (New York: Harpers Row, 1957), 77.

⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, May 20, 1925.

sunlight on the water. More decorous entertainment for adults included taking a steamboat excursion across Lake Winnebago.

During the 1920s something always seemed to be happening in Fond du Lac, whether it was a traveling show passing through the area, a local band taking the stage in the City Park, or a sporting event. These leisure activities brought the community closer together and helped create a greater sense of community pride for the citizens of Fond du Lac. In these days before modern innovations such as radio, television, or air conditioning, people often went to public venues for entertainment, and leisure typically meant coming together with others from the community. People went out on the town, so to speak, to be entertained, for there were few home entertainments, and few people in Fond du Lac had the resources or ability to travel great distances to a major urban center such as Milwaukee or Chicago.

One very popular traditional amusement of the latter 19th century and the early 20th century was the circus. Circuses were very well received in Fond du Lac, and Fond du Lac was known as a first class circus town during the 1920s. The traveling circuses that passed through town were often quite large, although none of the biggest shows, such as Ringling Brothers or Clyde Beatty, came to town. One circus included 1,080 people, 500 horses and 1,200 wild and domesticated animals.⁸ People were always on hand to watch as the circus wagons were unloaded and the big top was set up. Children, as well as adults, lined the streets to witness the spectacle. The circus brought fascinating people and acts to Fond du Lac. The Walter L. Main Circus provides a good example. The world-famous Wirth Family Riders, an equestrian act, were one of its chief attractions.⁹ According to the *Daily Commonwealth* of June 22, 1923, the Wirth family was the greatest circus act ever to play in Fond du Lac. The price of admission to the circus varied with each circus that pulled into the city, but typically the shows were inexpensive, ranging from 15 cents to 25 cents per performance.

When the circus was in town, unusual promotions sometimes were staged to stimulate greater interest. During the Moose Circus' 1924 visit, the publicity gimmick

⁸ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 29, 1921.

⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, June 22, 1923.

was probably the only time that an elephant was given a birthday party in Fond du Lac. Babe, who was one of the elephants in the Moose Circus, celebrated her 12th birthday party on the steps of Fond du Lac's Courthouse. The city of Fond du Lac went all out for this celebration, and the party even included a monster birthday cake that had been made at the Gerhard bakery. In hope of increasing ticket sales, most circuses gave away door prizes, and Irwin Simon of Fond du Lac won the prize at that opening night of the Moose circus, an electric washing machine. A console phonograph and an automobile were also given away as attendance prizes by this circus.¹⁰

Traditional circus parades around the city also aimed to stimulate interest. A good example was the Sells-Floto Circus, which put on a grand parade in 1925. Thousands of spectators lined the streets to witness the parade through town and view the fine showing of equipment, numerous open cages containing tigers, lions, and other wild animals, and troupes of pretty horsewomen.¹¹ The circus was an all-day event, starting as early as 6:30 a.m., when the circus train arrived in the town. People were already there to view the unloading of the circus wagons, and this was followed by the opportunity to watch circus workers set up the big top at the lot where the circus was to take place. Midmorning, the parade of circus entertainers moved through the city. Thousands witnessed these parades, whose entertainers were adorned with bright and colorful costumes. Bands were included in the parades, and often featured a calliope, which could be heard throughout the city while the circus was in town. Following the parade, people filled the circus grounds to view the matinee performance of the circus.

Clowns were a popular attraction at the circus, and the Hagenbeck-Wallace circus was no exception when it graced the Fond du Lac fairgrounds for two performances in 1927. Over 75 clowns performed in this circus, and the clowns made even adults laugh out loud at their silly antics. The circus ended with a grand pageant in which riders and animals were costumed to depict the countries they represented.¹²

The city of Fond du Lac embraced these circuses wholeheartedly, as was evident by the sell-out crowds, year after year. One reporter for the *Fond du Lac Daily*

¹⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, October 10, 1924.

¹¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 22, 1925.

¹² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 14, 1927.

Commonwealth wrote: “Yes, circuses are much the same, but there is always something new, something a little more daring than we have seen before. And so we go, and don’t regret. We have caught the spirit of youth, adventure and daring for a couple of hours.”¹³ Circuses were a mainstay in the public entertainment presented during the 1920s in Fond du Lac, for every summer several circuses came to town to entertain the community.

Musical performances played an important role in occupying leisure time for the people of Fond du Lac. Concerts, including artists with national reputations as well as local talent, were common during the 1920s. These concerts were always well attended, whether they were given in a concert hall setting, at one of the local theaters in town, or in the City Park, now known as Lakeside Park, where a band shell was often in use during the summer months. Orchestras from throughout the Midwest came to perform in Fond du Lac. One such orchestra, the Blackstone Hotel Orchestra from Chicago, played for a dance at the Elk’s Club.¹⁴ Such dances took place almost monthly, and they featured dancing by hundreds of people gathered at the Elk’s Club to the music of a live orchestra that played the hits of the day.

Another musical form that gained great popularity in Fond du Lac during the 1920s was opera. Fond du Lac citizens formed the Fond du Lac Opera Chorus in 1920 in order to awaken an interest in music in Fond du Lac.¹⁵ Operatic events staged in Fond du Lac drew huge audiences, including 2,000 people for one show, who came from all over the state of Wisconsin.

These performances gave Fond du Lac a name in serious entertainment throughout the state. The organizers of the Opera Association claimed that money was no object in producing a show of top quality for the citizens of Fond du Lac. They handpicked the talent that was to perform on the stage of the Henry Boyle Theatre. On the opening night, opera stars of the day such as Lillian Eubanks, Arabel Merrifield, Ernest Davis, and Louis Kreidler performed for the Opera Association. These entertainers came from opera companies in Chicago, Minneapolis, and New York, and the orchestra was also composed of professional musicians from various organizations as

¹³ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, August 3, 1929.

¹⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, January 14, 1920.

¹⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, April 5, 1920.

far away as New York. Because the performers came only for the opening performance, they did not rehearse prior to the show, due to other engagements.¹⁶ Nevertheless, they performed to a standing ovation.

Local performers were also much in evidence. The Fond du Lac Drum and Bugle Corps was sponsored by a local American Legion Post, and this group competed in several different events during summer months in various cities around the country, representing the city of Fond du Lac. During the summer of 1925, the city of Fond du Lac congratulated its drum and bugle corps for a fourth place finish in a competition held at the national convention of the American Legion, held in Omaha. The corps had been judged on the basis of its uniforms, marching appearance, rhythm, cadence and maneuvers.¹⁷

In addition to local bands that performed for Fond du Lac citizens, the city was graced by the President's own band in 1925, when the United States Marine Band performed two concerts at the Senior High School Auditorium. All the city schools, both public and private, were closed early to allow the children to attend the concerts.¹⁸ Events like these were exciting for the city of Fond du Lac, and many citizens took advantage of the opportunity to see what the local newspaper considered the finest band in the country. It was reported that 2,000 listeners attended the programs.¹⁹

Public music performance was indeed alive and well in Fond du Lac during the 1920s. One of the main reasons for this was due to the efforts of Fond du Lac's own Military Band. Each summer, the Military Band performed in several concerts at City Park. The band was a symbol of both civic pride and a love for music in the city. Park concerts began their season on Memorial Day and continued throughout the summer.²⁰ Hundreds of people attended these concerts during the summer months, often combining a musical evening with a picnic dinner in the park and conversation with family and friends. These were evenings in which families could be together and enjoy some great music by local musicians.

¹⁶ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, October 9, 1925.

¹⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, October 9, 1925.

¹⁸ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 4, 1925.

¹⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 5, 1925.

²⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 7, 1928.

Many famous musicians gave stellar performances in Fond du Lac, but perhaps one of the most notable entertainers to grace a stage in Fond du Lac was the world-famous contralto and mezzo-soprano, Madame Ernestine Schumann-Heink, who gave her final Wisconsin concert in Fond du Lac. The mayor of Fond du Lac was so excited to have her in town that he bestowed honorary citizenship upon her. This was the first time that anyone had received this title.²¹

Theaters provided notable leisure activities in Fond du Lac. In some ways the 1920s represented a high point for theaters in the city. The relatively new medium of film was coming into its own, bringing about technological transformation of the buildings, and Fond du Lac experienced a theater boom, with both new construction and renovation of existing buildings. During the 1920s several renovations occurred in the theaters located in Fond du Lac. Large sums were invested, in one case as much as \$600,000. Owners of the theaters competed to ensure that the opening nights of new or renovated theaters outdid their competitors for glamour. The red carpet was rolled out, and in some cases, famous celebrities graced stages in Fond du Lac for special openings.

The theater business appears to have operated on very narrow margins, for ownership changed frequently. The Henry Boyle Theater, which opened in 1910, was taken over by a new owner in January 1920. The new owner promised top quality shows and entertainment for the patrons of the Henry Boyle Theater.²² Nevertheless four months later the headlines of the local Fond du Lac paper read, "Henry Boyle Theater Sold."²³ A main reason for the high turnover rate was that theater was an expensive business in Fond du Lac. Smaller theaters tended to be less economically viable, and the trend was toward consolidation, larger size, and corporate ownership.

The Henry Boyle Theater saw another change later that year, as its name was changed to the New Garrick Theater. The theater was closed for a facelift in which 250 extra seats were put in the balcony section of the theater and a new moving picture mechanism was installed to attempt to make the theater more cost-effective. The New Garrick Theater combined films with a forty-week live stage vaudeville season. Each

²¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 11, 1928.

²² *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, January 30, 1920.

²³ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 30, 1920.

vaudeville program consisted of five acts. In the 1920s, vaudeville remained a major part of theater entertainment, both in Fond du Lac and in the nation. Almost every theater in Fond du Lac presented vaudeville shows. The New Garrick Theater was part of an entertainment circuit that included theaters in Madison, Racine, Kenosha, Oshkosh, Stevens Point, Eau Claire, and Minneapolis.²⁴ The entertainers traveled from town to town, performing in each of the theaters on the circuit.

An exception to the prevalence of vaudeville entertainment was the Orpheum Theater, which primarily showed films. The Orpheum also received a remodel in 1920, during which it was closed for four weeks for changes that cost \$30,000. The Orpheum was a large movie house that seated over 700 people. Three showings a day, a matinee and two evening screenings, were a typical schedule for the theater.²⁵

Some people claimed that this was the golden age of films, and there were several significant improvements in production during the 1920s. Gestures captured on film became less jerky, the settings became less improbable, the connections between sequences were smoother, and one no longer had to wait for a minute or two every time one reel was removed from the projector and another threaded.²⁶ Improvements in the technical and production quality of films helped them gain popularity among patrons in Fond du Lac.

Competition among Fond du Lac theaters was intense as the owners jockeyed for popularity among patrons. Smaller theaters closed and theater chains were growing. In 1923 the Fond du Lac Theater Company combined the New Garrick, Bijou, and Orpheum theaters all under the same ownership.²⁷ Newer and bigger theaters were also being built in the city. Two new theaters were erected on Main Street in 1925.

The first of these, owned by Fischer Paramount Theaters, was a combined movie and legitimate playhouse, meaning both films and live theater were presented. The new theater building also housed seven stores and 20 apartments. Its auditorium of roughly 26,400 square feet had enough seats for 2,000 audience members. This theater was regarded as the most impressive building in Fond du Lac at the time. It occupied a lot

²⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 30, 1920.

²⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, June 7, 1920.

²⁶ Graves and Hodge, 137-138.

fronting 140 feet on Main Street and extended east from Main Street 240 feet.²⁸ Mr. Fischer claimed that Fond du Lac was “the most progressive city in the state of Wisconsin and that it would support a theater that was capable of giving people high quality amusement.”²⁹ When Fischer’s theater opened in 1925, Miss Gladys Ralston, Miss Paramount, was the emcee for the event. The total cost of building the Fischer Theater was nearly three quarters of a million dollars.³⁰ The opening of the theater was a gala event that many anticipated eagerly. According to the *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, most people had never seen an event quite like this one.

The building itself was impressive. The sign on the outside of the theater alone cost \$7,000. It weighed roughly two tons, was 50 feet high, contained 794 25-watt lamps in the letters, and had 672 15-watt lamps in the flashing border.³¹ If the sign meant anything, this theater was huge, especially for a town the size of Fond du Lac. There was a spacious lobby area with a beautiful ceiling decorated with tan and gold colors. A massive chandelier hanging from the ceiling provided light for the guests. All three upper levels of the theater overlooked the gorgeous lobby area. Once inside the theater, patrons who looked up at the ceiling saw a beautiful decorative plaster relief, a huge dome, glittering chandelier, massive beams and artistic mural paintings.³² The management claimed that no show was too large, no attraction too small, to be efficiently handled. The Fischer Theater, they asserted, rivaled any theater in the country.

In close competition with the Fischer Paramount Theater was the Retlaw Theater, which was owned by the Saxe Brothers, who controlled more than thirty theaters in Wisconsin.³³ Opening only a month after the Fischer Theater, it was just as impressive. On the second level of the theater was a lounge where patrons could rest and relax, while on the third floor there was an impressive ballroom, one that experienced much use during the 1920s. On the opening night of operation, after the performances in the theater, patrons went to the Retlaw Roof and danced to music provided by Dexter’s Wisconsin

²⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 31, 1923.

²⁸ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 14, 1923.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 14, 1923.

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 25, 1925.

³¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 25, 1925.

³² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 25, 1925.

³³ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, December 26, 1925.

Roof orchestra.³⁴ Both theaters were located on Main Street, within two blocks of one another. The two represented an impressive entertainment array for this city.

In response to the opening of these two picture palaces, the New Garrick Theater was again remodeled, because it was losing patrons to the two brand-new theaters. In their advertising, W.L. Ainsworth and F.R. Smith, who owned the theater, also played on the fact that their remodeling, unlike the construction of the two new theaters, was completed using exclusively local workers.³⁵ Though the owners had great hopes for their renovated theater playhouse, no theater in town could compete with the two impressive new theaters in Fond du Lac, both of which had major corporations behind them. Gradually the smaller theaters in Fond du Lac closed, unable to compete with the larger theaters in the city due to their backing from big corporations that produced higher quality entertainment at a lower cost than could be obtained by the locally owned, smaller theaters.

Another activity that was extremely popular in Fond du Lac was dancing. The “dance craze” that swept America and Europe after World War I was much in evidence. Several new dances were introduced to the people of Fond du Lac from an array that included the “twinkle”, the “jog trot”, the “vampire”, the “camel walk”, and the “Charleston”.³⁶ People tried out the new steps at local halls where formal dances were held. One of the more popular Fond du Lac spots for dances was the building known as Armory “E”, a National Guard training center where every New Year’s Eve couples dressed up in their best attire to bring in the New Year. At the dance that was held in honor of the New Year of 1920, 300 couples danced to an orchestra that played “all of the hits the guests wanted to hear.”³⁷ Another popular place for dancing was the Elk’s Club, and they also welcomed in the 1920 New Year with what they called the “Sylvester Ball”. The Elk’s Club served dinner to 250 people, many of whom came from Milwaukee,

³⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, December 28, 1925.

³⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, May 11, 1926.

³⁶ Graves and Hodge, 119.

³⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, January 2, 1920.

Oshkosh, and Chicago, and they danced all night long, or at least until the orchestra stopped playing at three in the morning on New Years Day.³⁸

Armory “E” hosted many events in Fond du Lac during the 1920s. Anything from sporting events to dances might happen on a given week, but the biggest events staged there were the dances held several times during each year. One of the more impressive dances held at the Armory was the 1920 “Leap Year Ball,” sponsored by the Charity Club.³⁹ As was typical, dinner was served to those in attendance early in the evening. During dinner, the orchestra played background music. Afterward, the band fired up all of the great hits, and people danced. The halls were decorated, and those in attendance were in fancy dress. Gentlemen wore tuxedos, and ladies wore very nice gowns, which everyone showed off in the Grand March that typically took place during the middle point of the evening. The Grand March featured couples walking around the dance floor while the orchestra played a tune. As each couple promenaded around the floor, everyone could see who was in attendance and admire what the women were wearing.

In the 1920s, people in Fond du Lac always seemed to be looking for a reason to host a party. At one Halloween party sponsored by the city, 10,000 people showed up for the event, and 3,500 apples were consumed during a “bobbing for apples” contest.⁴⁰ Such large publicly sponsored social events formed a major part of organized leisure activity in Fond du Lac.

Spectator sports also played a large role entertaining the community during the 1920s. Such sporting events had first gained popularity in the decade before World War I, but during the 1920s, they came into their own. Boxing was one of the principal spectator sports in Fond du Lac during the 1920s. The Fond du Lac Boxing Club was formed in 1920, and Jack Brunkhorst was named the promoter for the organization.⁴¹ The first event put on by the Boxing Club was staged at Armory “E” in front of 2,000 vociferous people. The fans were treated to three bouts that night, and in the main event they witnessed Mike Ertle defeat Pekin “Kid” Herman in 10 rounds.⁴² This event saw the

³⁸ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, January 2, 1920.

³⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, April 9, 1920.

⁴⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, November 1, 1923.

⁴¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, February 18, 1920.

⁴² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 6, 1920.

biggest crowd ever to grace the Armory “E” building. It was a night of firsts, for according to the *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, it was the first time in the history of boxing that women had been permitted to be spectators at ringside. Reporters recalled that the women seemed truly to have enjoyed themselves at the event.⁴³

Participation and spectatorship in sports both played a big part in the community, bringing people closer together to play the game or to support the home team on the baseball field or on the basketball court. F.J. Rueping of Rueping Leather Company helped fund a sports facility, known as the Rueping Athletic Field, which was home for Fond du Lac’s baseball team during the 1920s.⁴⁴ Fond du Lac played in the Fox Valley Baseball League, which played semi-professional baseball. The league featured other teams from Appleton, Menasha, Kaukauna, Oshkosh, and Sheboygan. Crowds of over 3,000 witnessed the games played at Rueping Field.⁴⁵

Another popular sport in Fond du Lac was basketball. The games were played at the Armory “E” building, and the community supported these games well. A national tournament was hosted in Fond du Lac in 1921. A first prize of \$600 was awarded to the winning team. Teams from all over the nation came to compete, and they played before packed Armory “E” crowds during the course of the tournament. Basketball was not only popular with adults in the community. It also had a tremendous following at the high school level. Coach E.D. Fruth, for whom the Fond du Lac High School football field is named, coached the local high school team to the 1922 state championship. The entire city of Fond du Lac celebrated as Coach Fruth put Fond du Lac athletics on the map.⁴⁶

During the 1920s, Fond du Lac sporting teams played some tremendous games on the floor of Armory “E,” but none was as big as a basketball game between the local team, the Legionnaires, sponsored by the local American Legion Post, and a professional team from New York known as the Globetrotters. The Globetrotters were expected to beat the Fond du Lac team handily and go back to Oswego, New York the victors. The Legionnaires, however, did not listen to what the media were writing, for the Fond du Lac

⁴³ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 6, 1920.

⁴⁴ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, June 21, 1920.

⁴⁵ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, August 10, 1922.

⁴⁶ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, March 27, 1922.

squad defeated the Globetrotters in both of the games they played in 1923. The Fond du Lac team downed the Globetrotters 18-15 on Saturday night and then more convincingly on Sunday afternoon, 30-15.⁴⁷ Both games were played before sold-out crowds who cheered their home team to victory. While sports often seemed to be of primary importance in Fond du Lac, contests sometimes had to take a back seat. On at least one occasion, a night of basketball games was cancelled because the National Guard needed the Armory for drilling.⁴⁸

Most sports in Fond du Lac were very competitive. One that was gaining in popularity as a gentlemen's game, one that is still popular today, was volleyball. This was a winter sport commonly played by businessmen who enjoyed this indoor game during cold weather. Volleyball games were played during lunch hours at the local Y.M.C.A., and leagues formed in both Fond du Lac and Appleton. Appleton had several strong teams, and members of clubs from Fond du Lac often traveled to Appleton to participate in games against the Appleton squads.⁴⁹

Racing was also very popular in Fond du Lac during the 1920s. Horse races, of course, were a traditional entertainment. A new wrinkle was automobile racing. Fond du Lac seems, however, never to have developed an interest in bicycle races, which were popular elsewhere in the 1920s, beginning with the Tour de France that had first been run in 1903.

The Fond du Lac racetrack was located at the fairgrounds, and both automobiles and horses raced there before capacity crowds. That the City of Fond du Lac loved the sport of horse racing was evident from the number of races that took place during the summer months. Most of these races occurred during the County Fair, and riders came from all over the state to participate.⁵⁰

Not all entertainments in Fond du Lac were civic-sponsored or public. Not all were legal. Speakeasies and bootleggers thrived in Fond du Lac during prohibition, and the city had always had its share of houses of ill-repute. These activities are only

⁴⁷ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, January 22, 1923.

⁴⁸ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, April 5, 1920.

⁴⁹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 26, 1921.

⁵⁰ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, September 18, 1926.

recorded in police files and court records of the period. There was a darker side to public entertainment, too, for Fond du Lac hosted at least one large Ku Klux Klan rally during the 1920s.⁵¹ One may also speculate about how many hip flasks found their way into Fond du Lac's many dinner-dances.

There were also traditional informal entertainments. A popular activity that children enjoyed during the summer months was swimming. Children had many opportunities to go swimming in a variety of places. The top three were the old swimming hole, Lakeside Park on Lake Winnebago, which featured a large water slide, and the pool at the Y.M.C.A. The swimming hole was located on the bank of the Fond du Lac river, just outside the southern city limits. The children who went there were normally seen walking around barefoot and soaking in the sun while enjoying the afternoon. Out of the three possibilities for swimming, the children's favorite place was the swimming hole, perhaps because it was the cheapest and least regulated.⁵²

While the children had the swimming pool and swimming holes to enjoy during the summer months, many adults preferred steamboat rides on Lake Winnebago, at least during the early years of the 1920s. Several boats were used for excursions on the lake, including *Lily*, and *Laura May*, both of which took people out on the lake or on excursions to Winnebago Park and Calumet harbor. Those days were short-lived, however, for 1922 was the last year in which passenger steamboats were operated on the lake. The last two boats used on the lake were the *Paul L* and the *Valley Queen*. The *Valley Queen* made Sunday and nightly trips from the Fond du Lac end of the lake to other points from Winnebago Park to Calumet Harbor. The steamer often carried 400 to 600 people for a day of pleasure, and crowds gathered at the river dock to see the boat come in after an evening run.⁵³ One hazard of these excursions was fire. The last boat in

⁵¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, July 6, 1926. See Sally Albertz, "Fond du Lac's Black Community, and Their Church, 1865-1943," in Clarence B. Davis, ed. *Source of the lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 48-50.

⁵² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, June 23, 1921.

⁵³ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, June 9, 1923.

operation in Fond du Lac, the *Valley Queen*, caught fire in her berth and burned to the waterline, bringing to an end the era of steamboat excursions from Fond du Lac.⁵⁴

Band trips highlighted the boating excursions. The Fond du Lac Military Band participated in excursions to Winnebago Park, where the band played in the park pavilion and the passengers danced the night away. Often, fireworks greeted the patrons upon their arrival to Winnebago Park. Perhaps it was the automobile that brought an end to the passenger boats. With the advent of the car, people could get to other cities more easily on a rapidly improving road system. This meant that many people started to prefer a ride in the countryside in a private auto instead of a steamboat ride.

Fond du Lac offered its citizens an impressive array of leisure activities and spectator sports in the 1920s. More people had disposable income to enjoy such pursuits and improvements in transportation, especially the automobile, which permitted people from surrounding communities to come to Fond du Lac, swelling the large crowds who attended many events. During the 1920s public entertainments were a major fixture in this small community. Organized spectator and participant events helped create greater sense of community, and they provided socially acceptable outlets for newly gained spare time. Many such public entertainments had come into existence in the nineteenth century; others, such as the dance craze and spectator sports, were phenomena of the 1920s. Commercial television did not exist during the 1920s, and the radio was in its infancy. Fond du Lac's first station, KFIZ, was licensed in 1923, and the station was only beginning to experience commercial development.⁵⁵ Therefore, mass entertainment was a more public phenomenon in that era, one in which groups of people came together to be entertained and emphasized by limitations in transportation that left smaller communities like Fond du Lac to thrive as autonomous regional cultural centers. By the end of the decade, further dramatic changes had taken place, as older forms of entertainments disappeared, the depression limited disposable income, and technology began to shape entertainments such as films in ways that made that medium even more important and

⁵⁴ On steamboat excursions, see Timothy A. Casiana, "Down the Not-So-Lazy River: Commercial Steamboats in the Fox River Valley, 1843-1900, in Clarence B. Davis, ed. *Source of the lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 193-94.

⁵⁵ Anne Kelly, "KFIZ: Fond du Lac County's Original A.M. Radio Station," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac: Action Publishing, 2002), 269.

more homogeneous, at the expense of local and regional live entertainment. In retrospect, the 1920s must be seen as a transitional period in which mass leisure activities, spectator events, and publicly organized popular culture were beginning to evolve, yet one in which some older, traditional forms of entertainment still persisted.

**Marytown, A Holyland Community:
Built on Dreams, Persisting on Spirit, 1849-2003**

Kathryn Bartel

High on a hill in the northernmost corner of Fond du Lac County sits a church dedicated to the Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, the cornerstone of the community of Marytown. From this vantage point the church has been the focus of changing times in that small community. Many were drawn to the area by its beauty and by the fertile soil brought by the glaciers. The displaced Woodland Indians of the East Coast, the earliest pioneers, were followed by New England Yankees and European immigrants.¹ Each group left an imprint on the communities they founded and inhabited.

Marytown is characteristic of many small communities in the area. The influences of the European immigrants, in combination with state, national and global events, have shaped the community for over 150 years. Through the years, Marytown has come full circle. From its humble origins, as a small group of immigrants established a church in 1849, it evolved into a thriving community in the early 1900s, and more recently became a bedroom community for larger urban entities nearby.

Long before Marytown was founded or Wisconsin was declared a territory, the French explored the St Lawrence River and the Great Lakes in search of a Northwest Passage to Asia. Here, a viable fur trade emerged as it became evident that the natives were willing to trade furs to acquire metal tools or utensils from the French. Furs were a valuable commodity in Europe and one of the few goods that did not lose value during transport. Fur trade was profitable and paid the costs of running a colony.

France's defeat in the French and Indian War resulted in the Treaty of Paris, which turned possession of the trading posts over to the British. Following the American Revolution, the British continued to inhabit Wisconsin. The eventual British retreat from Wisconsin was not immediate but happened in stages, and the British monopoly on the fur trade was a continuing influence. John Jay's Treaty in 1794 required the dismantling of British military posts but allowed for the continuation of trading posts.²

¹ Robert Nesbit, *Wisconsin a History*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973), 3-5.

² Nesbit, 17-74.



*St. Mary's Church, Marytown,
(During Reconstruction after 1907)*

In what would become Wisconsin, an American military presence was established to regulate the fur trade and Indian affairs. Starting in 1835, the U. S. Army 5th Regiment used Indian trails as the basis for laying out the Military Road in order to link forts from Prairie du Chien to Green Bay. This road, the precursor of much of current-day U.S. Highway 151, helped to open the frontier to settlers.³ Early settlers traveled Military Road and then plodded into the backwoods to claim their property in the wilderness.

In 1836 Wisconsin was officially declared a territory, and the area near Marytown began to be settled. George White followed the Military Road and arrived at Calumet Harbor (renamed Pipe) in 1837. There, White established a hotel and bar and set about acquiring tracts of land, establishing himself as a land agent for landowners and the government. In 1840, White applied for the town of Calumet to be removed from Calumet County and added to Fond du Lac County. By 1842, the township of Calumet was established in Fond du Lac County, and George White was elected its first supervisor.⁴

1838 and 1839 were prosperous years for Calumet Harbor, as it conducted more business than the whole city of Fond du Lac. In 1846 Henry Fuhrman built the stagecoach inn in Calumet Harbor that became a major stop on the Military Road. By 1847, Calumet Harbor had semi-weekly stage and mail service to Milwaukee and Green Bay, twice weekly to Sheboygan and Fond du Lac and weekly to Madison. A three-story hotel with a dance hall on the second floor, the inn continued to serve food and refreshments under the name of Club Harbor until the late 1970s. Today the building sits vacant and deteriorating.⁵

Small settlements began to spring up in the outlying area. Approximately two miles east from Calumet Harbor, a group of six families founded a Catholic parish in 1841. A church was built in 1842, the first Catholic Church located between Milwaukee

³ Betz, Maureen, and Ebert, John. *Fond du Lac County: The Gathering Place*, (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 1999), 31-32.

⁴ Harney and Tucker, *Illustrated Historical Atlas of Fond du Lac County 1874*.

⁵ Ruth Shaw Worthing, *The History of Fond du Lac County as Told by its Place-Names*, (Oshkosh, 1976), 18-21.

and Green Bay. Named for St. Johannes Geminde, the community was known as Hinesburg, (present day St. John the Baptist, Johnsburg).⁶

Publications such as “Friendly Adviser for all Who Would Emigrate to America and Particularly to Wisconsin,” along with letters from families and friends, who had immigrated to America, were widely circulated in Europe and found an interested audience in Prussia. The climate, soil, and topography of Wisconsin were similar to German and Scandinavian homelands. Embittered by the restrictive power of the clergy and officials, many sought to leave the burden of heavy taxes and bureaucracy for political freedom. “Kein König da” (no king there) was a common sentiment. The rise of industrialization was resulting in the collapse of the agrarian system, and the population of Northern Europe had doubled from 1700 to 1800, leading to a concern for the future. “All that seemed to grow in the economy were the tax rate and the bureaucracy.”⁷

Many immigrants were artisan townsmen or small rural landowners who sold their shops or land and used the money to move to America. In 1848 the cost of an adult passage was \$40, and the trip lasted 42 to 52 days. In 1830 there were fewer than 3000 German immigrants in Wisconsin. By 1854 the number had risen to 215,000, and by 1885 one third of the population of Wisconsin had a German background.⁸

One such group of pioneers set down roots in a small community to the north of Calumet Harbor. These pioneers met for Sunday Mass in the home of Mathias Burg or traveled to the church in Johnsburg. In 1849 Archbishop Henni granted permission to the settlers to build a church. The church was dedicated to The Visitation of the Blessed Virgin Mary, and section 27 of the town of Calumet was named Marytown in its honor. The village of Marytown remained unincorporated and never had a governing body specific to the village. It stretches approximately a mile and a half in length across State Highway 149.

It is hard to define membership in the Marytown community. Membership often means being a member of the parish or of the community athletic association. People living within a ten-mile radius of the church are commonly considered members of the

⁶ Worthing, 52.

⁷ Nesbit, 156.

⁸ Nesbit, 155-156.

Marytown community. In the beginning, Marytown was almost exclusively a Catholic community. Although it still remains primarily Catholic, it has become more diverse in recent years. The church is the only source of records, and in the early years sacraments were the only recordings. In 1850, there were 11 deaths recorded, 11 marriages and 37 baptisms. These records, however, are deceiving as a reflection of the population of Marytown, since people from the outlying communities of Jericho, Charlesburg, St. Anna, and St. Joe traveled to Marytown for services prior to building their own churches.⁹

Marytown's first resident pastor was Father Fabian Bermadinger, an immigrant Capuchin Franciscan from the Viennese Province. Upon his arrival in Milwaukee in 1847, Fr. Bermadinger was sent by Bishop Henni to assist Fr. Casper Rehl in his ministry in the Calumet region. When controversy arose in Johnsborg over where to build the new church, Bermadinger left in frustration and moved to Marytown.¹⁰

Many pioneers of this uncharted frontier traveled through Marytown on the way to their settlements. In 1847, George White accompanied William Ostenfield to visit his mother in Schleswig-Holstein, a state in northern Germany belonging to the King of Denmark. White was searching to find buyers for land in Wisconsin. The ongoing conflict among the Danes, Prussians, and the ethnic Danes and Germans in Schleswig-Holstein had people looking to find a peaceful place to raise their families. Unable to speak much German, White depended on Ostenfield to relay the message of Wisconsin's treasures. Ostenfield described the vast wooded area, the possibility for obtaining good farm land, and the beauty of Lake Winnebago.¹¹ "While the Americans who resettled in the west from the east sought out the easier to cultivate prairie states, the Germans preferred to seek out wooded Wisconsin where they could feel more at home."¹²

On April 2, 1848, a group of seventy people began their sojourn to America, led by White and Ostenfield. After traveling by ship, steamboat, railroad, ox-drawn wagon and on foot, they arrived at White's hotel in Calumet Harbor on May 25, 1848. From

⁹ Copies of St. Mary's Visitation Church records, located at the home of Judy Schmitz.

¹⁰ Donald Wiest, O.F.M. Cap. "Fabian Bermadinger O.F.M. Cap.," unpublished essay in possession of Fr. Ron Jansch O.F.M. Cap.

¹¹"A bit of Germany in Wisconsin," personal memoir of immigrant in New Holstein library.

¹² Puchner, Rudolph. *Memories of the First Years of the Settlement of New Holstein*. (New Holstein: D. Cooley Co. 1994), 15-16.

there they set out to find the land they had purchased, which became known as New Holstein. Their journey brought them to Marytown, a Rhenish-Prussian colony, and at that time the last settlement on the edge of the wilderness. Here they encountered Phillip Kraemer. He traveled on with them, serving as their guide, and was hired by some to build their houses. As pioneers traveled through Marytown, they often stopped to buy a cow or hire builders. The Marytown settlers were considered especially hospitable as they helped clear the land, cutting and trimming trees to build houses.¹³

Many immigrants were also drawn by the writings of immigrants such as Dr. Carl De Haas. De Haas was a graduate of the University of Berlin and wrote and published his first drama in Germany about 1845. It is unknown why this learned man came to farm in the town of Calumet, but his communications back home were eventually published in a book titled *North America Wisconsin: Hints for Emigrants* in 1848. On August 2, 1847 De Haas, along with his brother and nephew, bought a 40-acre farm for \$275. On October 11, 1850, this property was sold to Peter Stephany for \$350. For a short time De Haas ran an inn in the village of Calumet, and then he bought property on a lake that is currently named Wolf Lake, where he established a brewery. This endeavor was also short-lived. He sold the brewery to his nephew and moved east and worked in the field of journalism. In 1871 he moved back to the area, settled in Fond du Lac, and successfully founded and published a German-language newspaper *Nordwestlicher Courier*.¹⁴

North America Wisconsin Hints for Emigrants attracted the attention of and served as a guidebook for many who emigrated from Germany. De Haas told his readers that people in Milwaukee recommended Fond du Lac County and specifically Calumet Township as a place to settle. He also gave a beautiful description of the flourishing fields and prosperous farmers he encountered. Readers were informed of every aspect of the trip: the costs, the journey, what to take and what to leave behind and how to pack. The differences in climate were also noted, as De Haas kept records of daily temperatures. The report remarked on the health of men and women living in Wisconsin, mentioning their healthy glow. He also reported on the safety of the region, noting there

¹³ Puchner, 24-25.

¹⁴ Dr. Carl De Haas, *North America Wisconsin: Hints for Emigrants*. (Germany: Elberfel and Iserlohn, 1848), Foreword.

were no police forces in Calumet, since “crimes are rare in the city and almost unknown in the country.”¹⁵ In describing the Indians, he said that in the Brothertown settlement the Indians spoke fluent English and were similar to other inhabitants of the area.

Conversely, the nomadic Indians stuck to their traditions, yet were timid around the Europeans. He considered none of the Indians to be a danger to immigrants.¹⁶

As immigrants were drawn by such writings, the community of Marytown started to expand around the church. A post office was an early sign of progress in frontier communities. In 1854, the Marytown post office opened, and John Krause was assigned as its post master. This post office served the community until 1905.¹⁷

Even prior to the post office, a school had joined the church to form a small complex of public buildings in the community. Until the arrival of the Sisters of St. Agnes in 1865, the school was staffed by lay teachers. In 1895 the Sisters of St. Francis assumed the teaching positions and continued to do so until the return of the Sisters of St. Agnes in 1910. Although 1895 coincided with the construction of St. Agnes Hospital in Fond du Lac, no documentation has been found to explain why the Sisters of St. Agnes were absent from Marytown during this period. By 1917 community growth resulted in the need to expand the school. A brick school and convent were constructed, finished in 1918, and this building still stands today.¹⁸ The convent now serves as the rectory for the parish pastor.

Many communities were touched by fire during this period, and Marytown was no exception. In May 1879, a stove explosion caused the log church in Marytown to burn to the ground. This building was replaced by one constructed of stone. In May 1907, Marytown again fell victim to a fire that damaged the church and destroyed the rectory and several homes. Although the church was extensively damaged, the stone walls remained intact, and it was decided that the walls could be used in the rebuilding of the church. Services were held at the school until reconstruction was completed in 1908.¹⁹

¹⁵ Puchner, 39.

¹⁶ Puchner, 1-51.

¹⁷ Worthing, 62.

¹⁸ “Jubilee Centennial Book,” (Marytown: St. Mary of the Visitation Parish, 1949), 35. On file at Wisconsin State Historical Society.

¹⁹ “Jubilee,” 24.

St. Mary's Church's impressive location and its architectural beauty have drawn many to view it, and it has often been photographed throughout the years. Unlike many Catholic churches renovated in the years since the Vatican II Council, St. Mary's has retained its old world ambiance. The church contains ornate woodwork and the walls are adorned with hand-painted stencils and other art work.

As early settlers worked to build their community, they also labored to establish their farms and commerce. One such early settler was Nicholas Heus, who arrived in Marytown in the early 1800s. The Heus family home, built in 1848, currently houses the family of Ralph Heus, one of his descendants. Nicholas' son Matthias and grandsons Germaine and Ernest left a mark on Marytown's history, as they founded and managed Heus Manufacturing. Heus specialized in the manufacturing of agricultural machinery. In 1890 Matthias designed and built the Heus Elevated Carrier, a barn cleaning system that used a tub on a cable and pulley to transport manure from the barn. Prior to the invention of the carrier, farmers used a horse and stone boat to clean their barns.

Another innovation designed by Heus was the Snow Flyer. In the early years of the automobile, winter roads were often impassible, and the Snow Flyer was a solution to this problem. Attached to a Model A or Model T, it had a track that allowed the motor vehicle to glide over snow. In 1928 Admiral Richard Byrd invested in a Snow Flyer for his historic expedition to the South Pole. For many years, a large picture of Admiral Byrd and his Snow Flyer graced a wall of Heus Manufacturing. The manufacture of the Snow Flyer required a work force of about forty people. Eventually the design was sold to Arps Company, and the number of employees at Heus was reduced to about twelve.

Heus also designed and built corn huskers, grinders, and adaptable power take offs. The adaptable power take off (PTO) found a commercial as well as an agricultural market. Mounted to the front of a Model A Ford, the PTO was used to power welders and silo fillers. In the South, it became a popular tool for peanut growers to use in harvesting their crops. Through the years, the company changed and adapted its products to fill shifting niches in commercial and agricultural markets. After Ernest and Germaine Heus sold the business to Joe Hammer, he continued to design and manufacture products for local industry, while adding a line of sport fishing equipment. Ice augers and sturgeon

spears were designed and produced by Heus Manufacturing. Upon his retirement in 1984, Joe sold the business to the Enneper family, its current owner. Today the company's focus is on contract manufacturing for Fortune 500 companies.²⁰ Although the company is no longer owned by the Heus family, it still bears the name Heus Manufacturing, and a descendant of Heus' is currently the company's vice president.²¹

For the early pioneer farmer in Marytown, as elsewhere in Wisconsin, wheat was the optimal crop to grow. It could be sown with minimal preparation of the soil and could be ignored until harvest time, allowing the frontier farmer to spend time clearing more land to expand the farm. Harvested wheat stored well and transported easily. The McCormick Company's production of its wheat reaper allowed farmers to plant more wheat, as harvesting became easier. Development of rail transportation made shipping and milling even more accessible. The largest yield of wheat in Wisconsin's history was realized in 1860. As domestic and foreign demand increased, prices peaked at \$2.96 a bushel in 1867 and stayed above \$1.00 a bushel until the close of the 1870s. During this era, Wisconsin became the second largest producer of wheat in the country.²²

But the wheat-driven prosperity was fleeting. As farmers faced the realities of soil depletion, pests, and crop disease, their yields of wheat declined. It was evident that agriculture in Wisconsin was in need of a transformation. Thus wheat farming was gradually replaced by the dairy industry. Settlers on the frontier had considered the dairy cow initially as a source of milk and butter for their immediate needs. Milk cows did not enjoy the same respect afforded to "working" animals on a farm. Beyond the milk and butter provided, such cattle were often used as a meat supply during long arduous winters, for they were expendable. It was a long, slow process to turn farmers' attention to the opportunities available to dairy farmers, but by 1899, wheat production had failed and 90.5% of Wisconsin farms kept dairy cattle, with 17.4% of these farmers completely dedicated to dairy. The transition had begun.²³

²⁰ Ralph Heus interview, September 2003, and Heus Manufacturing, Inc. <<http://heusmfg.com/>>.

²¹ "Manufacturer builds on past," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, November 28, 2003.

²² Nesbit, 281.

²³ Nesbit, 287.

Commercial butter production from farms soon became common. Easier to handle than liquid milk and less complex to process than cheese, farmers started to produce butter for sale. They used it to obtain credit against their accounts with storekeepers. The storekeepers, in turn, sold butter to buyers from the cities. Even poor quality butter was sold to be used as wagon lubricant, commonly known as “western grease.” However, cheese was the ideal product for dairy farmers to produce. It used whole milk, kept better than butter and therefore could be shipped greater distances. But cheese required an investment in equipment and storage space, a steady supply of milk, and training beyond that possessed by the average farmwife.²⁴

A major influence on the transition to a dairy economy was the invention of the silo in 1877. Prior to the introduction of the silo, farmers were unable to store enough feed for their whole herd to survive the winter. Herds had to be thinned before winter, and milk production consequently declined seasonally. Another development, the commercial creamery, gave farmers an outlet for their product.²⁵

Creameries started to spring up throughout Fond du Lac County. In 1914 Hubert Bartel, with his Madison Dairy School certificate in hand, purchased the Marytown Creamery, in company with Matt Moersch. By 1917, Bartel had become the sole proprietor, and in 1921 he constructed a new factory on the site. The factory was steam powered by a boiler stoked with wood (coal in later years), employing a pulley and belt system to run the equipment. The workers were mostly local residents, and some boarded with the family. The factory averaged six or seven full time employees, although sometimes the number rose to nine or ten.

Butter was one of the primary products of the creamery. During 1923, the creamery shipped 333,244 pounds of butter and handled 7,583,470 pounds of milk. The daily average was 33,500 pounds of milk, although a season record was set on June 12 1924, with 43,000 pounds. After returning from a day at school, Hubert Bartel’s oldest children, Dorothy and Walter were confronted each day by up to 3,000 pounds of butter to be wrapped and packaged. Wally remembered, “Some days we wrapped with tears

²⁴ Nesbit, 285-286

²⁵ Norman Risjord, *The Story of the Badger State*. (Madison: Wisconsin Trails, 1995), 133.

running down our faces, but on days that salesmen came, we wrapped especially fast as they, impressed with our speed, would leave us a tip.”²⁶

In the early years, farmers delivered their milk by wagon in large cans that held 130 to 150 pounds of milk. Some farmers supplied as much as six to seven cans a day. Over time, the Bartel business increased to the point where the creamery had 102 suppliers spread over an eight-mile radius. Bartels started to pick up milk in return for a fee. In 1924 they had a fleet of three trucks and two horse teams. The trucks made two deliveries a day, and the teams made one. At this time, Marytown had the largest one-man, whole milk creamery in Wisconsin.²⁷

Many of the local farmers were reluctant to give up delivering their own milk to the creamery, for it was their life-line to the larger community. There they could communicate with neighbors and catch up on the latest news. More importantly, this was their network to obtain help to work the fields. It was a common practice for farmers to collaborate with their neighbors to harvest crops. The creamery passed the word about who was in need of a hand and also sent factory workers to help in these endeavors, knowing they would be paid in kind.

When winter came, the creamery took on the daunting task of retrieving ice from the lake. Six to eight of the local farmers or their farm hands would take turns working two and a half to three weeks with three of the creamery employees to fill the creamery’s 50-foot square icehouse. Removing a handle from a crosscut lumber saw, they broke through the ice and proceeded to cut three-foot squares. These squares averaged eighteen inches in thickness, but during a severe winter they might be as much as three feet thick. With the help of a pulley, horses pulled the blocks out of the lake. After traveling about six miles to the icehouse, the blocks were packed in sawdust to keep them insulated. In later years, a Model T Ford helped saw through the ice. The saw was attached to a wheel, and the engine supplied power to operate the saw.

Thus stored, ice lasted through the summer, and it was a vital component of butter production. Ice was used in the creamery to cool the milk and butter as well as during

²⁶ Wally Bartel interview, October 2003.

²⁷ “Clean Milk, Spotless Factory, High Standards Bring Fancy Price for Marytown Butter,” *New Holstein Reporter*, July 1924.

subsequent transport, when the butter was packed in ice and hauled eight miles to Puddlefort, the railroad station in Calvary.

The creamery prospered until World War II brought changes. One of the by-products of butter was casein. This was used in the manufacture of billiard balls and glucose, but more importantly it was an ingredient in the glue used to build airplanes. Because of its importance to the military, casein was rationed, and the government set a low price on it. Butter prices were in decline, and things looked grim for the creamery. To combat these financial trials, the creamery started to produce cheese. One of the main products was American cheese, which was processed in cheddar rounds and sold to Kraft Foods. Bartel's creamery stayed in production until the mid 1960s.²⁸ After seventy years of doing business, in 1991 the creamery buildings were razed.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Marytown became a thriving, self-sufficient community. Along with industry and many farms, the town boasted a number of professionals, tradesmen, and merchants. John Zierer was the local photographer, residing at the foot of the church hill. Much of his business centered on taking First Communion, graduation and wedding photographs for members of the community. Zierer rented out the front room of his residence as a doctors' office. Two doctors living outside the community held office hours in Marytown, Dr. Fechter and Dr. O'Donnel. Dr. Mc Ginnery, a dentist, also set up a practice in Marytown.

A blacksmith shop was located in the southwestern corner of the town. In 1913 Anton Fassbender, who immigrated from Boos Mayen, Germany, and had been a cavalryman and a blacksmith in the German army, bought the blacksmith shop and eventually constructed new buildings on the site. Fassbender made a living shoeing horses, building hay wagons and stone boats, sharpening plow shears and doing repair work. In November 1945, Paul Wagner bought the business. As blacksmithing was disappearing as a profession, he converted the smithy into a welding shop. This business thrived for years until, in 1998, unable to find a buyer, Wagner closed the doors.

Henry "Bumpus" Guelig ran another village blacksmith shop at the north end of town. He opened his business in 1925, offering blacksmithing, general repairs, and racks

²⁸ Wally Bartel interview, October 2003.

and truck building. Guelig stayed in business until his death in 1946. The building in which his smithy was located no longer exists.

On the corner of Hwy 149 and Kiel Road, Paul Klapperich garaged his trucking business. Klapperich trucked milk to the creamery and cheese from the creamery to Plymouth and Black Creek, but his main business was the haulage of corn, other grains and a variety of odd items, including Christmas trees. Klapperich traveled north to pick up the trees, which he sold to the local community from his truck garage. Klapperich's trucks were also used to transport local children on expeditions to Columbia Park. In 1987 Klapperich sold his trucks and went out of business.²⁹

To the southwest of town, approximately two miles outside the village, was the local jeweler, Matt Schoenborn. His store was located in his home and, like many of the local merchants, he also farmed in addition to running a business. Schoenborn was a watch repairman and also sold jewelry. A large pocket watch hung from his window as an advertisement. Matt Schoenborn's son, Oscar, followed in his father's footsteps. The store was moved to Kiel in 1945.

At one time, Marytown supported three grocery or general merchandise stores. Patrons chose their purchases and had them wrapped in paper and tied with string. The storekeeper kept a running account of items purchased. Items stocked by the various stores, in addition to food, included an array of goods from fancy lace to boots. The Heus General Store was in business for nearly fifty years. In the early 1900s, residents of Marytown bought their groceries there, and they also sent and received their mail at the post office located in the store. By the 1940s, the store was sold and became Diederich's Clover Farm Store.³⁰

Another grocer was located on the highway below the church. From 1929 until 1952, this establishment was owned by John Winger. Winger was also the church's janitor and groundskeeper. With the help of his children, he shoveled snow at the church, school and rectory. Ringing the church bells at morning, noon, and 6 p.m. constituted another of his duties. His daughter Lucina recalls that in the winter, when it was dark before 6 p.m., she would take her dog to church for company. She held her dog in one

²⁹ Lloyd Klapperich interview, October 2003.

arm and rang the bells with the other. Some of the other responsibilities of the family included digging graves, clipping grass around tombstone by hand, and drowning gophers that were found in the cemetery. The Winger Store was eventually renovated into a residence.³¹

There were also two hardware stores in Marytown. The Langenfeld Hardware Store was located on the north end of town, directly behind Diedrich's Clover Farm Store. The store sold farm machinery as well as general hardware. It burned to the ground in the 1930s while under the ownership of Joseph Petrie. The building that housed the Faber Store still exists today, but it has been converted into apartments. Faber ran a tinsmith business in conjunction with the hardware store.³²

By 1950 Marytown also boasted three garages. Walber Auto Service, next to Wagner Welding, repaired cars, pumped gas, and even sold cars on commission. When this business did not prosper, the building was eventually sold to Wagner Welding and used for storage. A few buildings away, across from Klapperich Trucking, Ben Ebertz opened a filling station, and he also did minor repair work.³³ Ebertz's garage was torn down and is now a vacant lot. On the north end of town, Fritz Heus owned and operated the town's third auto repair shop from 1924 until 1954. The garage was destroyed by fire and rebuilt in 1963 while under the ownership of Mike Klapperich. In March 1977, Larry Conwell bought the Marytown Garage and currently runs it in partnership with his son, Larry Jr.³⁴ It is one of the few remaining successful businesses in the community.

Another establishment that is still in business is the local bank. The Farmers and Merchants Bank of Marytown was incorporated in 1917 and opened with \$10,000 in capital stock. In 1984, the bank listed assets of over \$11 million dollars. The original bank building was replaced by a new structure in 1966, and a major remodeling and expansion was completed in 1985. In a 1985 news article on the renovations, then president Larry Muldoon was quoted as saying that he expected the bank, "to be

³⁰ "Heus General Store Serving Marytown Half Century, Sold," *New Holstein Reporter*, March 23, 1980.

³¹ Personal letter from Lucina to Gordie Halbach.

³² Estelle Walber and Ralph Heus interviews, 2003.

³³ Estelle Walber interview, October 2003.

³⁴ Larry and Pat Conwell interview October 2003.

successful as an independent, locally owned facility” for a long time to come.³⁵

Ironically, the following year, in 1986, the bank was sold to Marshall & Ilsley Corporation and became a branch of their New Holstein office. The bank subsequently became a branch of the National Exchange Bank when it was acquired by that company on November 14, 1994.³⁶

The mill was the place where farmers brought their corn and other grain to be ground into feed. The original Schnell mill was located at the north end of Marytown. In 1890, the mill was moved downtown, adjacent to present-day state Highway 149. Schnell sold the mill to H. F. Burmeister, who in turn sold it in 1945 to August Sippel. Eventually, larger mills outside Marytown provided this service, using trucks that did the grinding right on the farm, and this “improvement” resulted in a decline in business for local mills. As its commercial business dwindled, Ralph Heus bought the mill in 1972 to provide the feed needed for his chicken farm.

In 1962 Heus Farms started an egg business, working out of the basement of the family home. As egg sales grew, Heus provided eggs for about thirty-five commercial customers. These accounts included stores, restaurants, and hospitals. Thirty thousand chickens supplied twenty-seven thousand eggs daily. When no longer productive, the chickens were sold to the Campbell’s Soup Company. In 1983, Heus Egg Farm built a new larger facility on Kiel Road, outside Marytown. At this point, Heus employed six people in addition to family members. Although the business was growing, to stay competitive in the egg industry, Heus needed to expand even more. Successful producers typically kept thirteen million chickens or even more. The realization of the implications of that enormous expansion caused Heus and his family members to re-evaluate their circumstances. They decided to terminate the business and sold the facility. In late 1995, it became the new home of Heus Manufacturing.

Another local agricultural industry was the Bartel and Winkel mink ranch. In addition to the creamery, in 1926 Hubert Bartel decided to go into the fur business. In combination with Adolph and Paul Langenfeld, he started a fox farm. Shortly afterward, the Langenfelds branched off into a separate business. In 1928, Bartel and John Winkel

³⁵ “Farmers and Merchants Bank holds open house,” *New Holstein Reporter*, February 14, 1985.

incorporated the business as Associated Fur Breeders. By the 1940s mink replaced the foxes. According to a 1965 article in the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, the Bartel and Winkel firm was, “one of the state’s largest and best quality producers of mink.”³⁷ Eventually Bartel’s son Andy became the owner of the ranch.

For many years the fortunes of the ranch fluctuated with the fur market. In the 1980s production was at its highest level, with the ranch maintaining a population of approximately 34,000 mink, of which 26,000 a year were pelted. There were eight full-time and twenty-five seasonal employees. The majority of the workforce came from the community of Marytown. Often the seasonal and part-time employees were young people, and many of these individuals credit the ranch with helping to pay for their college educations. By 1989, the good business years came to an abrupt end. High prices in the 1980s had caused overproduction of furs, especially in Europe. This economic trend, combined with the decreasing popularity of fur in the fashion industry, badly damaged the industry. In 1990 the ranch downsized and cut production by about 50%. Finally, in 2002, the mink ranch closed.

Following Sunday services or after a trip to the feed mill, people typically gathered at the local taverns. Marytown had two taverns and two dance halls. Directly below the hill on which the church was located stood a tavern connected to Fuhrmann’s butcher shop. Another tavern was situated across the street from the mill. This establishment had an upstairs hall that was used for meetings and socials. After electric power arrived in Marytown, customers could pay their electricity bills at this tavern. At one point, a barbershop also operated there. Both taverns and the butcher shop have closed and now serve as apartment buildings.

One of Marytown’s halls was located at the north end of town. Like the rest of the taverns, it served Friday fish fries and Saturday chicken dinners, depending on who was the proprietor. In later years, the hall was used primarily for basketball games and practices, banquets and meetings. Fergie and Regis Mertes were the last proprietors, and in 1989 they went out of business. Today this building sits vacant and deteriorating.

³⁶ Bank records.

³⁷ “Mink: No Business For Amateurs,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, 17, September 1965.

On the opposite end of town was the other dance hall. Upstairs from the Gerhartz Dance Hall there were rooms for rent, and there was a livery stable below for the horses. Occasionally a horse trader came to town and held a horse auction on the hall grounds. The hall also housed Simon and Gerhartz, one of the town's grocery stores, as well as Edgar Mueller's barbershop.³⁸ Currently this building is the home of The Marytown Tap, the only remaining tavern in the community.

The Marytown Tap is one of the few remaining businesses in town. The National Exchange Bank and Conwell's Garage are the only others still in operation. Heus Manufacturing still thrives, but after relocating to Kiel Road, it is now located a short distance outside the village. Nevertheless, local residents still refer to it as belonging to Marytown.

During the time when the town prospered, wedding receptions were one of the main functions of the Marytown dance halls. A December 1916 article in the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* titled "Marytown Girl Becomes Bride" details a reception for 500 people held at Henry Gerhartz's hall. Both a dinner and supper were served to guests.³⁹ Weddings were a momentous celebration in the tiny community. Besides wedding celebrations, the halls were used for entertainment such as church dinners, dances, local productions of plays, and the ever-popular game of basketball.

In 1909 the Marytown Colts basketball team was formed. According to the local newspaper, "they were doing fine work considering that some of them had never seen a basketball before."⁴⁰ The team went on to have a successful season, and basketball became a staple part of local entertainment. Into the 1980s basketball was still being played at Fergies. When Fergie went out of business, Marytown still sponsored teams but they used facilities outside the community for practice and games. By the late 1990s both the men's and the youth basketball teams were no longer sponsored by Marytown. The men's team was eliminated. Because of reduced numbers and the lack of a facility the youth teams combined with other local community teams.

³⁸ Estelle Walber and Ralph Heus interviews, 2003.

³⁹ "Marytown Girl Becomes Bride," *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, December 6, 1916.

⁴⁰ "Marytown News," *The New Holstein Reporter*, January 27, 1909.

Baseball is another sport that long retained its popularity in the Marytown community. Through the years, there have been three different sites for the community baseball field. One was behind the Marytown Tap, another was on the west side of Highway 149, near the corner of County Road HH, and the present-day location is in the center of town on the east side of the highway. The community athletic club sponsors baseball teams for kindergarteners through adults, and softball teams are supported for early grade school- through high-school-aged players. The athletic club runs the annual Marytown Picnic and took over Paul Klapperich's Christmas tree sales after he retired. Along with the concession sales from games, these two major fundraisers support the club's sponsorship of the teams.

The Marytown Veteran Club was organized in 1947. In the past it also sponsored sports activities for area youth. For many years its membership worked in collaboration with the Athletic Club to run the local annual picnic. In recent years, the organization has curtailed its activities because of a decline in membership and lack of younger members.

As time passed, the church continued to be a major influence on the community. In addition to meeting the spiritual needs of parishioners, it also met many social needs. The Holy Name Society for young and adult men and the Christian Mothers for women had both been established by 1920. The Holy Name both physically and financially assisted with maintenance of the parish. They sponsored both Catholic Youth Organization basketball teams and a dart ball team.

The Christian Mothers, rechristened the Altar and Rosary in the 1960s, was an important social outlet for many parish women. Meetings included entertainment or informative speakers together with a cake and coffee social that typically followed the business portion of meetings. As an increasing number of women began to work outside the home, the emphasis of the society turned to service. Upkeep of the altars and sanctuary has always been part of its mission, along with the responsibility for leading the rosary at weekend services, serving funeral dinners, quilting for missions, and fundraising through craft and bake sales. An annual breakfast and a Christmas party still provide opportunities for socializing, in addition to the fellowship that occurs while performing services.

As Marytown quietly grew and prospered as a self-contained farming, commercial and industrial community, outside influences slowly started to intervene, eroding the autonomy of the town. A dramatic example of the starkness of these influences can be seen in the case of Peter Gerhartz and Joe Muellenbach. Born in 1893 and raised on a farm outside of Marytown, Peter Gerhartz enlisted in the United States Army on July 23, 1918. A member of Company E, 314th infantry, he was sent to France and immediately went to the front lines. Gerhartz was killed in action in the Meuse-Argonne offensive on October 21, 1918. Having received no word regarding Peter's whereabouts, on March 16, 1919, local businessman Adolph Langenfeld wrote to the Adjutant General of the Army on the family's behalf. He received a reply from the headquarters of the 89th Division on April 17, 1919, confirming his worst fears.⁴¹ Peter's cousin, and best friend, Joe Muellenbach, survived the war, but he soon after contracted diphtheria, probably on his journey home, and he also died.⁴² These two young men share a monument in the Marytown cemetery that includes a picture of them dressed in their military uniforms.

This monument is emblematic of Marytown as a community. At the time of World War I, Marytown was still a young community, growing and hopeful. But powers beyond its control ended the community's expansion and growth and led to its decline. Year by year, these changes eroded the town's good fortune.

At the time of the parish's centennial in 1949, the expectations of the future were still hopeful. On Sunday, July 3, a special mass was offered. Reverend Henry Langenfeld, a priest-son of the parish, celebrated the mass. The sermon was given by another priest-son, Reverend Nicholas Langenfeld. Among the guests for the celebration was Archbishop Moses E. Kiley of Milwaukee. On July 4, Marytown's centennial parade attracted over 5,000 people to the small community, where they viewed a spectacle that included marching bands, floats, military veterans, and the centennial queen and her court.⁴³ A centennial booklet was published that recorded the history of the parish. Its concluding paragraph stated:

⁴¹ Copy of personal letter from Eighty-ninth Division Headquarters in Germany to Adolph Langenfeld, 1919, (copy in author's possession).

⁴² Story written by Delores Schmitz for sesquicentennial cemetery walk, based on family interviews.

⁴³ "Marytown Parish Plans Celebration," *The Sheboygan Press*, June 30, 1949.

To our forefathers who brought the faith to this land and so staunchly upheld it; to the pastors who have guided the parishioners through the years we owe our sincere gratefulness. It is through them we can look to the future with shining hope and a firm trust in God and our Lady.⁴⁴

The future was a recurring theme of the sesquicentennial, as Father Langenfeld ended his sermon with these thoughts:

As we hold on to the faith of our fathers, then this hill of Marytown, this hill of the Virgin, will continue through the coming years to be the ‘hill of God.’ The fat hill, rich in blessings: the hill on which it has pleased God to dwell.

But the future that was upon them and the changes that it brought were less rosy than the community might have hoped. Marytown experienced changes similar to those of other small communities throughout the country. Following World War II, mechanized farming caused major changes on the family farm, for less man power was now required. Outside influences became more insistent as industrialization and an expanded highway system had an impact. The improved highways, coupled with the increased availability of automobiles, resulted in people becoming more mobile. This mobility allowed them to turn to industry for employment outside the local community. Many farm families included a husband or wife who was employed in manufacturing in order to supplement the farm income. Children from farms increasingly left the farms to work in the factories.

As manufacturing firms opened and grew in the surrounding towns of Chilton, New Holstein, Kiel, and Kohler, many workers from Marytown began traveling to work in these new businesses. This brought changes to the face of the Marytown community. Slowly, many local businesses or tradesmen went out of business. Some, like the harness maker or blacksmith, became obsolete, but many others succumbed to competition from the larger towns of New Holstein, Kiel, and Chilton and eventually from Fond du Lac and Appleton. It became common for people who worked outside the community to shop outside the community. Today, the National Exchange Bank, the Marytown Garage and the Marytown Tap are the only surviving businesses in what was once a prosperous town.

⁴⁴ “Jubilee.”

Accompanying the changes of many commercial establishments in the community, there have been changes in the parish. As fewer women decided to adopt religious vocations, there were direct repercussions for the parish school. By the 1960s, the Sisters were no longer able to provide enough teachers to staff the Marytown School. The shortage of nuns, combined with the inability of the local school to provide resources to keep its students educationally competitive, constituted a serious problem. Parishioners realized that changes needed to be made in order for Catholic education to survive. In 1969, in combination with Johnsburg, Mount Calvary, and St. Cloud parishes, Marytown became a member of the Consolidated Parochial Elementary School. The name was chosen when the school board, overwhelmed with other decisions, was unable to agree upon a name and the treasurer simply had checks printed using the name Consolidated Parochial Elementary School. The *New Holstein Reporter* used the initials C.P.E.S. in an article, and the school was christened.

The Consolidated Parochial Elementary School saw many changes over the years, including the introduction of lay teachers as the primary teaching force. At the end of the 1990-91 school year, the Marytown school building closed. A decline in the consolidated school's enrollment resulted in a need for only three buildings, rather than one in each of the four parishes. As the northernmost school and the least centralized of the four parishes, it was decided that Marytown would close. Marytown parish continues to be a member of the C.P.E.S. school system, participating in its tradition of Catholic education.⁴⁵

Education has always been important to Marytown, and a surprising number of its residents have gained college and university educations. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, many of the children of Marytown's farmers and industrial workers had earned undergraduate and advanced degrees. There are graduates from a variety of law, medical, business, engineering, nursing, and education schools. But this increase in the level of education in the community has also resulted in a local brain drain, for graduates often pursue their careers elsewhere, leaving only a handful of the younger generation living in the community.

⁴⁵ "25 Years of C.P.E.S. History," Booklet produced for 25 year anniversary celebration.

The Church also experienced change. Not only were women's vocations in the Church diminishing, but also men's. The shortage of priests forced parishes to combine and share the ministries of a pastor. This situation occurred in the year 2000 for the Marytown parish. At that time, the parish priest was requested to take on the additional responsibilities of the Johnsburg parish of St. John the Baptist. Like a step backward in time, these two neighboring parishes were once again under the guidance of a single priest.

On May 18, 2002, a native of Marytown had the distinction of becoming the only priest ordained in the Archdiocese of Milwaukee. At the age of 62 Carl Diederichs fulfilled his calling. Diederichs' parents owned the Clover Farm Store, where he grew up stocking shelves and waiting on customers. In 1955 he graduated from the Marytown grade school and immediately entered St. Lawrence Seminary. Along the way to his vocation, he had a change of heart, and for a time he followed a different path. In 1999 he decided to return to the seminary. After his ordination, Reverend Diederichs celebrated his first mass on June 30 in St. Mary's Church. This was followed by a reception and brunch sponsored by the parish. His grade school classmates of 1955 presented him with a chalice, ciborium and paten at the occasion of his ordination.⁴⁶

As change became evident in the church and community, it also surfaced on the family farms. Although Wisconsin continues to be the nation's number one cheese producer, producing 30 per cent of America's cheese, it is evident that local farms are changing.⁴⁷ Dairy production remains the backbone of the farming industry, but the number of Wisconsin farms peaked in 1935 at 199,877, and the number steadily decreased to 78,000 in 1994. As the number of farms decreased, the average farm has increased in size. Farming is no longer viewed as a way of life, but rather as a business, and not all families are equipped to manage a farm as a business. Many lament the loss of value accorded to the family farm. According to a recent *Bishop's Statement on Rural Life*: "Farmers noted that the focus of the community life is little league and high school sports--not churches, and 4-H groups or farm organizations as in the past." The article also stated that retiring farmers lacked family members willing to take over the family

⁴⁶ "At 62, Marytown native joins Catholic priesthood," *The Fond du Lac Reporter*, June 26, 2002.

farm. This was attributed to the trend toward smaller families and to the lack of family members with a desire to work a farm.⁴⁸

Marytown as a rural community fits this pattern of decline of the family farm, for the number of family farming operations continues to dwindle there. In reality the family farm is a nostalgic notion, for during the past two generations, children from family farms in the area have increasingly chosen to leave the farm for other occupations. As efficiency in food production increased, smaller operations have had a harder time surviving. Of the family farms that remain near Marytown, many have become corporate entities. Changes in the agricultural industry, combined with the loss of local commerce and the brain drain of its youth, resulted in Marytown's transformation from a thriving town to a bedroom community.

Although it has declined in numbers, the community remains large in spirit. On July 18, 1996 a tornado tore through the community, randomly touching down to strew devastation in its wake. The community, as well as many outsiders, gathered in force to help in the cleanup effort. No lives were lost, but houses and buildings were demolished, and the debris from damaged property was deposited throughout yards and outlying fields and woods.

In 1999, the community rallied to throw a festive celebration to commemorate the sesquicentennial of the founding of the parish. Every month of the summer, there was some form of celebration. Starting May 30, a picnic lunch was served on parish grounds. The festival included a cemetery walk through Marytown's history and a pictorial history displayed in the school. This celebration was concluded with a vespers service in the church. On June 27, the annual Marytown picnic included a parade, silent auction, pork chop dinner, and a pictorial history. In July, a parish dinner and dance were held, and a living rosary was performed in August. The celebrations concluded in September with a week of "parish mission" and the annual Harvest Fest. Money earned from these various events was put into a restoration fund for the historic church.

⁴⁷ Wisconsin Milk Marketing Board, 7 November 2003. <<http://retailer.wisdairy.com/default.asp>>

⁴⁸ Archdiocese of Milwaukee. *The Changing Role of Rural Life in Wisconsin: Implications for Family Farms and the Church*. March 1997. <<http://www.wisconsinatholic.org/statements/ruralstatemen.html>>

The four years since the sesquicentennial have been active ones for the church. The long overdue restoration project has been completed. The crumbling walls have been re-plastered and repainted. The original artwork and stencils have been restored but not altered. Pews and wood floors have been refinished, and the area in back of the church has been converted into a gathering room. Outside, improvements have also taken place. The parking lot has been repaved, and a ramp for wheel chair access has been installed.

One hundred fifty years of settlement, growth, prosperity, change and decline have constituted this small community's history. Its future is uncertain as it awaits the impact of further changes in the Catholic Church, the economy, and other unknowns. But in 2003, the church continued to sit serenely atop its hill, surveying the landscape, as people rush past in pursuit of their daily lives.

The Fond du Lac Panthers: Fond du Lac's Professional Baseball Team

Katerina Harrison

In the summer of 1953, the Fond du Lac Panthers played their last season of minor league baseball. Over a thousand fans filled the stands to watch their local team take on teams from other Wisconsin cities on most nights when the team was playing at home that year. The ballpark at the Fond du Lac Fairgrounds was one of the best in the league. Fans came to watch some of their favorite players, like former Goodrich High School star Don Jaber, who had a pitching record of fifteen wins and seven losses during that season. The games were always fun for both the fans and the players. The players were there because they truly took pleasure in playing the game of baseball, and the fans came out to support their hometown heroes. Nevertheless, fan support for the minor league team was insufficient to keep the Panthers in business.

“Whoever wants to know the heart and mind of America had better learn baseball, the rules and realities of the games,” wrote American author and historian Jacques Barzun in what has become a commonplace observation.¹ Baseball, of course, has been embraced by many other cultures, including Cuba, Dominican Republic, and Japan, to name a few that have not necessarily been made more “American” by taking up the sport, but at a certain time, play of the game was certainly a descriptor for American life, however transient.

Baseball, often described as Abner Doubleday's invention, evolved in the United States during the later nineteenth century. The Civil War aided in the spread and increased popularity of the sport. Many towns organized their own teams that played against nearby rivals. By the end of the nineteenth century, a professional game had emerged, with teams concentrated in the northeast part of the country. The game was played in small-town America as well, but the dominant forces shaping the game were always the professional teams in the big cities. In the twentieth century, baseball became a national pastime. Professional sports became increasingly important, supported by the rise in leisure time and improving transportation during the 1920s, and spectator sports

¹ Jacques Barzun, *God's Country and Mine: A Declaration of Love Spiced with a Few Harsh Words*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Publishing Group, 1954, reprint 1973).

assumed an important role in the American experience. Players such as Babe Ruth, a New York Yankee star, gave the sport national attention through his home-run hitting record. As enthusiasm for watching the game grew, additional professional athletic teams, less talented and less well financed than the big league franchises, emerged in smaller communities. Together with many other similar towns across the country, Fond du Lac eventually became home for a minor league professional baseball team.

The Panthers, Fond du Lac's minor league baseball team, played during the 1940s and 1950s. They belonged to the Wisconsin State League. Fond du Lac was among one of six Class D teams composing the Wisconsin State League. This organization also included teams in Appleton, Green Bay, Sheboygan, La Crosse, and Wisconsin Rapids. The league brought baseball, often described as the sport of the common man and the blue-collar worker, to small cities across Wisconsin. During this era, baseball was the most popular sport in Wisconsin, even more popular at that time than professional football. It was played during the most enjoyable seasons in Wisconsin, spring and summer. And fans could attend a game at their convenience, for there might be games five or six times in a week when the team played "at home."² One could bring the family and take pleasure in eating a hot dog or peanuts, drinking a beer or a soda, and relaxing, all while watching a competitive game of baseball, and all at an affordable price. In Fond du Lac, students between fourteen and eighteen years old paid ten cents for a ticket; general admission was twenty-seven cents plus a three cent tax; and advanced sale tickets could be purchased for twenty-five cents at designated sites around town. The reserved seat tickets were forty-five cents, with a five cent tax.³

Baseball was initially divided into the major and minor leagues as a result of organizational intimidation by the dominant major league owners. The hierarchy of the leagues was created mainly for commercial reasons, specifically the National League owners' commitment to maintaining monopolistic control over the sport as a business enterprise. Today, there is a clear separation between the business structure of the majors and the minors. For the minors, the classification division is a ladder up which a player

² William F. Thompson, *History of Wisconsin, v. VI: Continuity and Change, 1940-1965*, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1988), 281.

³ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 15, 1941.

must move in hopes of reaching the major leagues. Major league players who fail to develop as ball players also might be “sent down” to the minors.⁴ The minors were first classified into Class A, B, and C teams. Class A players were better than Class B and so forth. Later, as the number and talent of players increased, the league developed Class AA and AAA leagues, which were ranked above Class A. As baseball became increasingly popular in smaller communities, a Class D system was also developed for more marginal farm teams. The Fond du Lac Panthers fell into this last category, at the bottom of the professional baseball hierarchy.

Some of the minor league teams developed players for major league teams. As the game that ultimately “mattered” in terms of finances for owners and salaries for players was the major league, the minors aided in the stable growth of the majors.⁵ Minor league teams also brought the game of baseball to fans who lived in small towns and communities and who could seldom attend a major league contest.

The Wisconsin State League began operations in 1940 and continued through 1942, when play was suspended for three years during World War II. The league resumed play in 1946 and continued until 1953, when it was forced to terminate operations because of declining revenues.

Minor league baseball gave players an opportunity to play almost every day, and the young men sometimes became hometown heroes. Such players might never be able to play in a major league atmosphere. L.H. Addington rather optimistically described the importance of the Class D baseball leagues in an article in *Baseball Magazine* in 1941:

They offer opportunities to the thousands of kids who want to be ballplayers. The AA's and the A-1's could not possibly take care of these boys until they have some of their rough edges sandpapered off.

The bigger fellows might go along for several years if there were no D's, but the pinch would soon begin to tell. The score or more of the D leagues in baseball today, are lifeblood to the game. If they should disappear, the absence would be felt all up the line and would eventually reach the majors.⁶

⁴ Neil J. Sullivan, *The Minors: The Struggles and the Triumph of Baseball's Poor Relation from 1876 to Present*, (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1990), 15.

⁵ Sullivan, 165.

⁶ L.H. Addington, “Minor League Expansion” in *Baseball Magazine*, June 1941, 329.

There was no need to go to college to play in these leagues. Before World War II, the players were usually recent high school graduates; the youngest were sometimes only seventeen years old. After the war, military veterans who were trying to resume their careers, usually without much success, filled the rosters. The aging ex-servicemen were sometimes maintained on the roster as mentors or drawing cards. In fact, players in Class D Baseball leagues had a 100-to-1 shot at making the major leagues, but lightning could strike. Don Jaber was one Panther who made it to the majors, and he enjoyed a brief career with the Milwaukee Braves.

The majority of Class D players were paid less than \$100 a month.⁷ Each class of baseball had a team salary limit and a limit on the number of players permitted to be on club rosters. The Class B league had a limit of seventeen players, and their salary was set at about \$4,600. The Class C league had a limit of sixteen to seventeen players and a salary limit of \$3,400. The Class D leagues, which included the Wisconsin State League, had a limit of sixteen players and a salary limit of only \$2,600.⁸

A Fond du Lac Panther like Don Jaber received \$150 a month, with a “stay-on” bonus of another \$150 a month. The “stay on” bonus was limited to certain talented players to encourage them to stay on the team and not jump to another team. The Yankees (the Panthers’ name in 1952) also provided about \$2.50 for meals at away games in addition to the monthly salary. This was usually enough to support a player and his family. Most players did not have second jobs during the season. They typically worked at jobs like construction through the winter months until spring training began. Additional pay could come from some unlikely sources. For instance, teams traveled to away games on a yellow school bus, and often the driver was a player or coach who was familiar with which roads to take to get from city to city. A player or coach might be paid about \$35 extra to drive the bus.⁹

⁷ Cliff Christl, “The Wisconsin State League” in *Northeast Wisconsin’s Historical Review: Voyageur*,” (Summer Fall, 2001), 22-27.

⁸ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 9, 1953 The *Milwaukee Journal* actually stated that the Class B league salary was \$3,400 and the Class C league salary was \$4,600. This is probably a reversal of the correct numbers in the article.

⁹ Don Jaber interview, December 6, 2002.

After World War II, there was a growing interest in baseball all over the country, including Wisconsin. “There was a period after World War II when every town big enough to have a bank also had a professional baseball team and the peak excitement was reached when a bank was robbed or the baseball team won the pennant.”¹⁰

The Fond du Lac Panthers officially opened training on April 25, 1940. The team played fourteen home games and fourteen away games during their first season. They wore white uniforms with navy blue lettering and piping for their home games and a blue-gray uniform with blue lettering and piping for their away games. Both uniforms had “Fond du Lac” across the chest, and the players all had blue caps with a white “F” on the front.¹¹

The Fond du Lac Baseball Park was the largest in the state baseball loop. The seating capacity of the stadium was about 7,000. The ballpark was located at the Fond du Lac Fairgrounds, off of Martin Street, in Fond du Lac. A lighting system was installed before the season began.¹² When manager Ray Powell arrived at the park, in 1942, he said of the ballpark, “It is undoubtedly one of the best Class D parks I have ever seen and it has all the facilities for developing young ball players. I was happy to see that it is so large and the boys and I are very well pleased.”¹³

The name “Panthers” was chosen as a result of a contest run by the *Fond du Lac Reporter*. Some other proposed names included: Cardinals, Black Sox, Green Sox, Mud Hens, Orioles, Bisons, Red Wings, Angels, Oaks, Beavers, Crackers, Barons, Lookouts, and Smokies.¹⁴ The decision to name the team was made by team executives.

Opening day was on May 9, 1940. On that day, Fond du Lac Mayor Promen declared a half-holiday. Stores closed early, and there were no afternoon classes in the schools. The celebration also included a parade held to open the season.¹⁵

In 1940, the team finished second in the league, a big league accomplishment in itself, because at that point the Panthers had no major league team to sponsor them.

¹⁰ Sullivan, 167

¹¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 24, 1940.

¹² *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 26, 1940.

¹³ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 22, 1942.

¹⁴ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 26, 1940.

¹⁵ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 9, 1940.

Instead, local businessmen and other local citizens who were interested in the team volunteered their time and money to sponsor the Panthers. This first effort was the most successful season record the team attained during its entire eleven seasons of existence.¹⁶

Impending war and the advent of a military draft ensured that there would be no continuity for the team. During the second season of Panther baseball in Fond du Lac, the team lost nine of its players to defense work or compulsory military service. The manager, Harry Rice, played every position except second base and shortstop to help fill gaps as players departed.¹⁷

Like many other members in the Wisconsin State League, the Fond du Lac Panthers became an affiliate of a major league team. The New York Yankees took on the Panthers as their Class D farm team in the Wisconsin State League. The Yankees provided financial support in exchange for the possibility of finding young talent on the team, and the major league club also paid for the uniforms, balls, bats, and other equipment.

During World War II, the league suspended play from 1943 until 1946. On May 15, 1946, when the league resumed, the Panthers played their first game against the Sheboygan Indians. Twenty-five men tried out for the team that year, but due to a limit set by the league, only eighteen could be offered contracts.¹⁸

The Panthers continued to receive community support from 1948 through 1949, averaging 80,000 fans a year. In 1950, attendance declined significantly to 60,000. The next year 1951, was even worse as only 43,000 fans attended games.¹⁹ During these years, typically, the Panthers finished somewhere in the middle of the league standings, never better than third after the 1940 season.

In 1952, in order to generate new interest, the Fond du Lac team, known for eleven prior years as the Panthers, became the Yanks. The name was changed to reflect their major league affiliate since 1942, the New York Yankees. As another device to hold local interest, the team had planned to name a “Yankee Queen.” Young women between

¹⁶ See Appendix 4.

¹⁷ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 15, 1941.

¹⁸ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 6, 1946.

¹⁹ See Appendix 2 for attendance numbers.

the ages of 17 and 25 who were Fond du Lac residents were invited to compete for the title in a pageant scheduled to be held on opening day of that season.²⁰

On May 4, 1952 at 7:00 p.m., festivities for the opening of the 1952 Wisconsin State League season began, featuring a variety of entertainment. Miss La Vila Gladis, a seventeen-year-old senior from Fond du Lac, was named “Miss Baseball.” Her prizes included a complete wardrobe, a portable radio, and she became a contestant in a further contest run by the Wisconsin State Loop. Raymond Jacobs was named the winner of the contest to pick a new name for the Panthers. His idea to change the Panthers to the Yanks won him a \$25 government bond and two season tickets to the Yanks home games, a prize that was worth about \$107. All the hoopla and merriment paid off for the team, for the opening game brought about 1,853 fans to the ballpark.

Despite the celebratory beginnings, the 1952 season was not a good one for the Fond du Lac Yanks. The team experienced financial problems and finished dead last in the Wisconsin State League. It seemed that the New York Yankees were little help to the local team, for the team performed worse with the New York Yankees as sponsors than it had in its first year with only its local business sponsors.

The team was deeply in debt, but fans campaigned at the fairgrounds to sustain the club. Midway through the season, a group of fans pledged \$7,000 to keep the Yanks in operation.²¹ The Yanks had experienced their worst season in the twelve years they had been members in the State League. At the end of 1952, a meeting was held at the Hotel Retlaw to decide if the Fond du Lac baseball team would continue to play another season as a New York Yankees affiliate.

There was a good deal of resentment aimed at the big leagues. One local fan writing to the local newspaper blamed competition from major league clubs for the Panther’s difficulties. “This is another nail in the baseball coffin. Let the major league clubs pay their fabulous bonuses. It doesn’t make sense. The major league clubs are to blame for the slow killing of minor league ball.”²² Many fans felt that the New York

²⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 22, 1952.

²¹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 1, 1952.

²² *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 1, 1952, Letter to editor from Nate Manis, Panther fan.

Yankees were not aiding the Panthers at all. Instead, the major league affiliate was hurting the team due to its lack of interest in the Class D team.

Fond du Lac had been part of the Yankees baseball system since 1942, and fan consensus in Fond du Lac opined that the Yankees had not done their best to support the team. All the major league teams had “farm” teams all over the country. The New York Yankees sent scouts to watch the games and practices in hopes of finding some young talent on one of their teams. Many sports writers and baseball officials felt that successful operations were impossible without major league assistance. However, while these affiliates are willing to pay big bonuses to untried youngsters, their operation of the lower minor teams, on which they were dependent for many of their future players, usually were economically parsimonious and sometimes even ungenerous.²³ Of course, it must be admitted that Class D baseball, the lowest of the categories, was by definition unlikely to provide many future major leaguers.

The President of the Board of Directors of the Fond du Lac Baseball club, H. R. Murphy, made an announcement on September 4, 1952, that it was the general consensus of opinion of the board that the Fond du Lac team would no longer affiliate with the New York Yankees. “We are not giving up baseball,” Murphy declared. The directors made plans to rejuvenate the club. They hoped to increase attendance at games. The new management had decided to run the club like a business in hopes of becoming a successful money making operation. Local businessmen like H.R. Murphy, owner of Edith’s Dress shop, Dr. Devine, a local physician, and Ernie Wonsloff, owner of Wonsloff Jewelers, decided to support the Panthers financially in their next and what would be their last season of play.²⁴ Since 1949, when the team finished in fifth place, attendance had declined. Local leaders hoped that, with a better team, attendance might improve.²⁵ But Fond du Lac was not alone in experiencing a decline in attendance at local baseball games, for this was a problem experienced by most minor league teams. During the decade of the 1950s, nationwide attendance at minor league baseball games

²³ *Milwaukee Journal*, August 9, 1953.

²⁴ Don Jaber interview, December 6, 2002.

²⁵ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 5, 1952.

declined from 42 million in 1949 to only 13 million in 1959.²⁶ Clearly, the problem was systemic for the minors, and dropping their affiliation with the Yankees was unlikely to produce a reversal of the trend in Fond du Lac, even if the move appealed to local pride and sentiment.

In keeping with the clubs reduced finances, the 1953 opening day ceremonies were not as elaborate as they had been the year before. There was no naming of a new “Miss Baseball” for the rechristened Fond du Lac Panthers. Even the weather was uncooperative, for the official opening game was postponed due to rain. Two days later, when the team finally played, there were only 592 fans in the stands. The 1953 season did not run as smoothly as the directors had planned. Acrimony dogged the team. In June 1953, Fond du Lac’s pitcher, Johnny Williams, was ejected for “defacing the ball” during a crucial game that would have put the Panthers in third place, had they won. “Defacing” meant to scuff the leather cover of the ball, an action that gave the ball a special hop or twist when it was pitched, and this practice was outlawed. The rules stated that any pitcher found guilty of such tactics automatically was to be removed from the game and suspended for ten days. When the ejection took place, a fight erupted, because the Panthers manager was denied the right to see the ball. Home Plate Umpire Bob Willis waved three policemen onto the field to try and restore order. After the scuffle, Joe Consoli, the team manager, was escorted from the field. One of the officers reported receiving a knee to the stomach. Stan Gores, a reporter for the *Fond du Lac Reporter*, noted that this was “one of the wildest affairs in the state league in many years and certainly one of the noisiest of the current campaign.” Many attributed this outburst to the frustration the players and managers expressed toward the umpires. These officials were deemed to be unsatisfactory, and it was alleged that there had been numerous bad decisions on their part, including missed calls on balls and strikes by “laugh-provoking” margins, failure or refusal to notify public address announcers of changes in the lineup, and shrugging of shoulders after a call, indicating uncertainty as to what decision to make.²⁷ As always, such criticism of officiating had no consequence other than to

²⁶ Thompson, 284.

²⁷ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 26, 1953.

enhance the feeling of victimization on the part of the Panthers. The team still lost the game, and its pitcher was suspended.

The 1953 season was remarkable in another way. According to Don Jaber, the team was integrated for the first time, with several African American and Hispanic players joining the roster. Jaber was in a position to know, for he had served as a ball boy for the team for five years prior to pitching for the Panthers in 1953.²⁸ The new players were drafted by the local businessmen, like H.R. Murphy, who had organized the team that year. According to Jaber, these players were accepted without the mayhem caused in the Major Leagues by Jackie Robinson's 1947 debut.

1953 was the last season that the Fond du Lac Panthers played organized baseball. Attendance in Fond du Lac bounced back, although it came nowhere near the numbers recorded in the late 1940s. Local supporters' efforts were to no avail, however, for statewide, the fans' interest had shifted from their local minor league team to a major league team, the Milwaukee Braves, newly relocated from Boston. Some believe it was also the popularity of the new medium of television that caused the decline of minor league baseball. Pittsburgh Pirates General Manager Branch Rickey said, "Radio has made major league fans out of minor league fans and you can multiply the damage many times in considering the television effects."²⁹ Whether the cause was the Braves, in their easily accessible County Stadium, the lure of televised games, or both, or whether it was the persistent failure of the local team to win, the Fond du Lac club suffered a disastrous decline in fan support.

There was no 1954 Wisconsin State League season. On September 15, 1954, the Wisconsin State Baseball League voted to end its own existence. The league president believed that the State League ended largely as a result of the widespread frenzy manifested by the arrival of the Milwaukee Braves in 1953. The Wisconsin State League ended with an attendance record of 332,771 in 1953, down from 352,000 in 1952. Ironically, this was still the highest attendance record for any Class D league in the

²⁸ Don Jaber interview, December 6, 2002.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 26, 1953.

country.³⁰ Appendix 1 shows the decrease in attendance, reflecting both diminishing fan interest and also a decrease in the number of leagues playing the game.

Earlier in 1954, Wisconsin State League President Duane Bowman had considered forming a Class C league in the Wisconsin area. This league was to include Green Bay, Wausau, Appleton, and Wisconsin Rapids. Other possible cities that might form teams included, Winona, Austin, and Rochester in Minnesota; Madison and La Crosse in Wisconsin; and Dubuque in Iowa. However, Fond du Lac was not included in this plan, and H.R. Murphy, president of the Panthers, was baffled at Bowman's announcement, for the Fond du Lac team had finished the 1953 season with money, unlike many other clubs. Fond du Lac was not alone in its exclusion. The perennial Wisconsin State League powerhouse Sheboygan Indians were also overlooked, despite their winning record. Probably Bowman's strategy was to include larger towns at a greater distance from the Milwaukee area, on the assumption that there was greater likelihood to compete against the draw of the Braves. Neither Fond du Lac nor Sheboygan fit this concept, for they were both too small and too close to Milwaukee. Ultimately, however, the proposed Class C league did not materialize.³¹

In 1955, there was still some interest in attempting to restart the league, but Duane Bowman believed that the "continued interest in the Milwaukee Braves has made the immediate future of the Wisconsin State League dismal indeed." The Braves had set new National League attendance records; they continued to attract the largest crowds in baseball from the time they moved to Milwaukee from Boston until the end of the 1950s. "There did not seem to be any reason for it to fold," Bowman said sadly, "not until that tremendous momentum came in here," meaning the Milwaukee Braves' arrival.³² But minor league teams were folding across the country. The 1956 season began with 32 minor leagues, a loss of 27 circuits from the 1949 season.

Several suggestions have been advanced as to why minor league baseball clubs declined at this time as a focus for public interest, not only in Wisconsin, but all around

³⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, November 8, 1954.

³¹ *Wisconsin State Journal*, March 31, 1954.

³² *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, April 5, 1955

the country. Several inventions and innovations of the times that were readily accessible to a growing middle class all figured in the decline in interest of the minor league sport.

Television, radio and air conditioning all helped keep previous supporters away from the ballparks. Television, a major new alternative leisure activity, and home air conditioning, which made summertime living rooms in front of the television more comfortable than a baseball park, were components that drew fans away from minor league baseball. The first televised major league baseball game was played between the Cincinnati Reds and the Brooklyn Dodgers on August 26, 1939. At the time there were fewer than 400 television sets in existence. The results were not very impressive. It was hard to recognize the players and difficult, with few cameras of limited mobility and the tiny screens of the early sets, to see what exactly was going on during the game in those pioneer broadcasts. However, people gradually found it more convenient to watch from their homes. As the technology of television improved, the impact of the new medium on the minor leagues increased. On April 14, 1952 the United States government lifted a three-and-a-half year freeze on the development of new television stations. Up to that date there had been only 108 television stations in the entire United States, and they operated exclusively in big cities. Eventually, 2,000 more stations were built throughout the United States.³³

Radio broadcasts also had posed some threat to minor league baseball. In 1926, American League President B. Bancroft “Ban” Johnson forbade broadcasts from American League ballparks out of fear that people would stop coming to the stadiums. “Ban’s” ban was lifted the following season, when it was realized that radio had actually generated interest, but of course broadcasts of major league games provided competition for the minors as well as support for baseball in general.³⁴

Air conditioning was an invention that tempted people to stay indoors instead of going to the ballparks. By 1951, inexpensive window air conditioning units were

³³ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, April 14, 1952.

³⁴ Baseball Stadium Technologies, available at www.colby.edu/~edkearns/basestadium/History2.htm, December 10, 2002. Johnson was President of the American League from 1901 until 1927.

available, and soon thousands of American homes had one of the units. In 1953, room air conditioning sales exceeded one million units, with the demand exceeding the supply.³⁵

Improved technology was only part of the problem for these developments were compounded by a changing legal environment that opened minor league baseball to greater competition in the United States. A significant blow to the minor leagues came when the Justice Department rendered an opinion that the restrictions that small franchise baseball teams had placed on broadcasting might be in violation of existing anti-monopoly laws. Before 1950, baseball clubs of any classification held territorial rights to radio and television coverage within a 50-mile radius of their franchise, thus preventing electronic competition.³⁶ With the disappearance of this protection, the Fond du Lac team had to face the full force of new competition, and consumers could choose between broadcast major league games and live minor league spectator sport.

The Fond du Lac Panthers brought years of entertainment and enjoyment to local residents. Many people who lived in Fond du Lac between 1940 and 1954 have at least one vivid memory of a Panthers game at the Fairgrounds Ballpark. The Panthers' major leaguer, Don Jaber, said it was a fun experience to play for the Panthers, and he would do it over again if he could. His fondest memory was a double-header in Appleton, where he pitched and won both games.³⁷ The Fond du Lac team was not one of the best in the league, but local support continued, regardless. Local radio station KFIZ helped to sustain the community's assistance for the team both financially and in building fan support in order to keep the Panthers playing.³⁸

Despite local efforts to support the team, a changing environment in the form of a major league team, technological innovations, and the loss of ability to control competition from broadcast of other games, took fans away from the minor league game. Support dwindled, and the team and the league were forced to terminate operations. Ironically, a year before Jacques Barzun penned his famous words about baseball,

³⁵Cool Net Air Conditioning and Refrigeration Institute Website, available at <http://www.ari.org/consumer/history/timeline.html>, Accessed December 9, 2002.

³⁶Allison Danzig and Joe Reichler, *The History of Baseball: Its Great Players, Teams, and Managers*, (Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1959), 130.

³⁷Don Jaber Interview, December 6, 2002.

³⁸Ann Kelly, "KFIZ: Fond du Lac County's Original AM Radio Station," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Action Printing, 2002), 282.

professional baseball ceased to be part of the “heart and mind” of the Fond du Lac community.

Appendix 1: Attendance Records for Minor Leagues Natonwide³⁹

Year	Paid Attendance	Number of Leagues
1947	40,505,210	52
1948	40,949,028	58
1949	41,872,762	59
1950	34,534,488	58
1951	27,518,837	50

*includes both regular and playoff games

Appendix 2: Season Attendance for the Fond du Lac Panthers⁴⁰

Year	Attendance
1940	39,346
1941	45,269
1942	23,565
1946	84,601
1947	73,037
1948	94,665
1949	78,103
1950	59,110
1951	43,097
1952	31,374
1953	53,000 (est.)

³⁹ Robert Obojski, *The Bush Leagues: A History of Minor League Baseball*, (Macmillan, 1975).

⁴⁰ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 2, 1952 and September 3, 1953.

Appendix 3: Wisconsin State League Teams and their Major League Affiliates⁴¹

Team	Year Joined League	Major League Affiliate.
Appleton Papermakers	1940	Cleveland: 1941-2, 1946 Philadelphia: 1947- 1949 St. Louis: 1950 and 1951 Boston: 1952 Milwaukee: 1953
Fond du Lac Panthers	1940	New York Yankees: 1942, 1946-1952
Green Bay Blue Jays	1940	Philadelphia: 1946 Cleveland: 1947-1953
La Crosse Black Hawks	1940	St. Louis: 1942
Wisconsin Rapids White Sox	1940	Chicago White Sox: 1940- 1942, 1946- 1953
Sheboygan Indians	1940	Brooklyn: 1948-1953
Oshkosh Giants	1941	New York Giants: 1942, 1946-1953
Janesville Cubs	1941	Chicago Cubs: 1941-1942, 1946-1953
Wausau Lumberjacks	1946	St.Louis: 1947-1949 Detroit: 1951-1953

⁴¹ Mike McCann's Minor League Baseball Page, available at http://www.geocities.com/big_bunko/wisconsinstate4653.htm

Appendix 4: Wisconsin State League Final Standings⁴²

1940	1941	1942	1946	1947
La Crosse	Green Bay	Sheboygan	Green Bay	Sheboygan
Fond du Lac	La Crosse	Green Bay	Oshkosh	Janesville
Wisconsin Rapids	Appleton	Fond du Lac	Fond du Lac	Oshkosh
Sheboygan	Sheboygan	Appleton	Wisconsin Rapids	Wausau
Green Bay	Wisconsin Rapids	Janesville	Appleton	Appleton
Appleton	Fond du Lac	Oshkosh	Janesville	Green Bay
	Janesville	Wisconsin Rapids	Sheboygan	Fond du Lac
	Oshkosh	La Crosse	Wausau	Wisconsin Rapids

1948	1949	1950	1951	1952	1953
Sheboygan	Oshkosh	Oshkosh	Sheboygan	Sheboygan	Green Bay
Wisconsin Rapids	Green Bay	Sheboygan	Oshkosh	Wausau	Wausau
Wausau	Sheboygan	Janesville	Green Bay	Oshkosh	Sheboygan
Fond du Lac	Wisconsin Rapids	Fond du Lac	Wisconsin Rapids	Appleton	Fond du Lac
Green Bay	Fond du Lac	Green Bay	Fond du Lac	Green Bay	Oshkosh
Oshkosh	Appleton	Wisconsin Rapids	Wausau	Wisconsin Rapids	Wisconsin Rapids
Appleton	Wausau	Appleton	Janesville	Janesville	Appleton
Janesville	Janesville	Wausau	Appleton	Fond du Lac	Janesville

⁴² Wisconsin State League Official Records, 1940-1942, 1946-1953, compiled by Otto Kaufman Jr., Sheboygan, WI, Fond du Lac Historical Society, Fond du Lac Panthers file.

“False Also and Harmful to Christian Education:”

Coeducation at St. Mary’s Springs

Scott Jazdzewski

The Catholic Church is an institution wherein change usually occurs with glacial slowness. Yet change does come. The transformation of St. Mary’s Springs High School into a coeducational institution illustrates how the Church can accommodate community needs, and it further illustrates the independent spirit of Fond du Lac’s community of Roman Catholic nuns, the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes. A group of citizens, supported by parish clergy, mobilized and requested this change at the local Catholic secondary school, to which they desired to send their sons. They garnered support from the religious order that operated the school, and the Bishop was willing to accommodate deviation from papally articulated policy in the interest of what was deemed to be a greater good. Springs thereby opened a new chapter in its history in 1939, when boys were allowed to attend the school, but what had begun as a stopgap, established and permitted to exist due to a lack of funds, evolved into a permanent feature of Catholic secondary education in Fond du Lac.

St. Mary’s Springs is a small Catholic High School located on the eastern edge of Fond du Lac, overlooking the city. The Springs, as it is locally known, sits along the North side of State Highway 23, straddling County Highway K. In 2004, the three buildings that served functional roles for the school at various points of its development still adorned the campus.

The school had its beginnings as support for a different kind of enterprise. Mother Superior M. Agnes Hazotte decided to purchase the 410-acre *Cold Springs Farm*, including buildings and livestock, for the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes from C.A. Wells in 1899 for the sum of \$31,500. The farm, renamed St. Joseph’s Springs, is the site where St. Mary’s Springs is located, occupying a tract of land bordering the “ledge,” a portion of the Niagara Escarpment that runs through much of the eastern part of the United States, including the eastern side of Fond du Lac, and which is one of the more picturesque spots in the state of Wisconsin. The purchase was made primarily to

Boyle Hall, St. Mary's Springs Academy

provide an economical source of food for a small hospital established by the Sisters of St. Agnes and additionally to provide land for a cemetery in which to bury deceased Sisters.¹

Two years later, a local entrepreneur who loved the numerous bubbling springs of clear fresh water on this piece of land decided that it would be an ideal place for a sanatorium to treat sufferers from tuberculosis. In 1901, at a cost of \$25,000, John T. Boyle erected the twin-towered building now known as Boyle Hall, named in memory of his mother, and presented it to the Sisters of St. Agnes.² This building sits facing westward on the south side of the current St. Mary's Springs school campus.

By 1909 the hospital in Fond du Lac was changing the features of the farm and spa. Father Irenaeus built the Lourdes Grotto in 1902, and St. Agnes Hall was built in 1903 to provide a department of hydrotherapy, using natural spring water from the ledge. The sanatorium, never a successful venture, perhaps because of its distance from town, was no longer needed.³ In 1909 Mr. Boyle provided the \$10,000 needed to convert the sanatorium into a boarding school for girls, an idea supported by Archbishop Messmer. The school was then given to the Sisters of St. Agnes to administer and staff.

On October 7, 1909, Archbishop Messmer formally dedicated the school.⁴ Seventeen students called St. Mary's Springs Academy home that first year. In 1911 the school had its first graduate, Esther Curly of Chicago. The early school combined primary and secondary education. A two-year commercial course accompanied a four-year classical curriculum, and such diverse subjects as household arts, music, and painting were offered. Some Sisters were sent to other schools to improve their training as teachers.⁵

¹ "Correspondence with the Archbishop regarding Co-Ed Academy 1939," located at the St. Mary's Springs Archive; Sister M. Vera Naber, *With All Devotedness* (New York: P.J. Kenedy & Sons, 1959), 133-4.

² "Correspondence with the Archbishop regarding Co-Ed Academy 1939."

³ Naber, 164.

⁴ Sister Vera Naber's account, 106, says the dedication took place on October 8, referencing a local newspaper article. It is more likely, however, that the ceremony took place on October 7, the Feast of the Holy Rosary of the Blessed Mother, and that Naber drew her date for the event from the report in the newspaper, published the next day. Archbishop Sebastian Gebhard Messmer (1847-1930) served as Archbishop in Milwaukee from 1903 until his death in 1930. He was the last European-born (Swiss) Archbishop in the diocese.

⁵ Naber, 167.

The goals and horizons of the school grew along with its activities and enrollment. In 1912 there were seven graduates, and the enrollment had risen to 54 students. An alumnae association was established, and in 1913 the school was accredited by the state of Wisconsin and affiliated with the Catholic University of America.⁶ These affiliations placed St. Mary's Springs Academy on a solid academic foundation as a Catholic boarding school for girls. The school's exclusive status as a boarding school came to an end in 1927 when bus service from Fond du Lac was established, enabling St. Mary's Springs to open its doors to day students. As a result, enrollment rose to 90 students.

The main building was erected in 1928-1929 to provide living quarters and a classroom. The new building, distinguished by a single large tower, a landmark building for the school, allowed the school to enroll more students and to provide increased services. Enrollment remained relatively low during the 1930s. When Sister Angeline, Principal of the Springs, visited Archbishop Samuel Stritch in company with Mother Joseph Wolford, General Superior of the order, enrollment at the Springs was a concern. At that time, enrollments had declined, due to the depression, and at that time stood at no more than 123 students, 56 boarders and 57 day students, according to one source, and only 108 according to another. The Archbishop considered that transportation was a greater problem than was tuition. He believed that providing better bus service and enlisting the support of local clergy would probably produce 100 day students from the girls of Fond du Lac. To encourage support from the parishes, a dinner for the local priests was requested, and the Archbishop addressed them, urging on them the value of a Catholic education, suggesting that students who attended a public secondary school would lose their "Catholic mentality."⁷ Despite these efforts, enrollment continued to languish through the 1930s.

Another pressing concern arose from parents in the Fond du Lac area. They sent their boys and girls to parochial elementary schools, but when their children reached an age to begin secondary education, the educational choices for the boys diminished. While the door of private education remained wide open for girls, this alternative was closed to

⁶ *Saint Mary's Springs (SMS) News*, April 1941.

⁷ *Annals*, Congregation of St. Agnes, April 15 and May 27, 1932.

any boy who could not attend a boarding school. Area parents could send their girls to the Academy, but if they wanted their boys to attend a Catholic high school, it would have to be in Milwaukee or Mt. Calvary. The closest school available, St. Lawrence Seminary in Mt. Calvary was still some 13 miles from Fond du Lac, a distance that made day-school attendance impractical for most. The consequence was that, after eight or nine years of Catholic education, Fond du Lac boys had no alternative but to enroll at a coeducational public school, if they wanted to continue their education while living at home.⁸ Fond du Lac was not alone in respect to an imbalance of educational opportunities for Catholic girls and boys. In 1897 there were three times as many Catholic schools for girls as for boys in the United States.⁹

After years of deliberation and discussion, area parents finally formally raised the issue of Catholic secondary education for boys in 1939. On May 1, Reverend W.H. Huemmer of St. Patrick's Church, accompanied by Mrs. J. P. McConnell, Mrs. D.E. Sullivan and Mrs. Joseph Daly, went to St. Mary's Springs Academy to discuss with the Principal, Sr. Angeline, their desire to have St. Mary's Springs transformed into a coeducational school.¹⁰ Sr. Angeline assured the group of four that she would bring the matter before Mother Aloysia, Superior General of the order, and her Council, which included Vicar Assistant Sister Joseph Wolford, First Councillor Sister Germaine Cassin, Second Councillor Sister Angeline Kamp, Third Councillor and Secretary General Sister Vera Naber, and Treasurer General Sister Seraphina Fellenz.¹¹ She told the group that she would do all in her power to help the people of Fond du Lac and the vicinity to obtain a quality Catholic secondary education for both their boys and girls.¹²

The following day, Mother Aloysia called a meeting of her Council to discuss the issue of making St. Mary's Springs a coeducational institution. Sr. Angeline presented

⁸ St. Joseph's School, alone among Fond du Lac parochial schools, offered a ninth grade. Interview with Sr. Marie Scott CSA, April 18, 2004.

⁹ Kathleen A. Mahoney, "American Colleges for Women: Historical Origins," in Tracy Schier and Cynthia Russet, *Catholic Women's Colleges in America*, (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2002), 2.

¹⁰ Sister Angeline served two terms as principal, the first from 1909-1920 and the second from 1928-1939. Naber, 250.

¹¹ Mother Aloysia Leikem was one of the founders of Marian College. She served as the first President and established the college to train the Sisters of the Congregation to become teachers. Sister Vera Naber was also one of the founders of Marian College and served as President and Academic Dean during 1951-1952. The first residence hall on campus, now converted to faculty offices, bears her name.

the petition of Father Heummer and his parishioners to Mother Aloysia and her Council. They decided to ask the advice of Archbishop Samuel Stritch on the matter.¹³ Sr. Angeline and Sr. Vera were delegated by the Council to present the matter to Archbishop Stritch.

Since 1929 official Church policy on Catholic education stated that boys and girls should be educated separately from each other. Pope Pius XI decreed in his encyclical letter on “The Christian Education of Youth,” that boys and girls should only be united in matrimony, and during the adolescent years, the most critical years for adolescent development, they should be educated separately. Thus Catholic coeducational secondary schools were not viewed as acceptable.¹⁴

Sr. Angeline and Sr. Vera met with Archbishop Stritch in Milwaukee on May 12 at his residence, and they presented him with the petition from Father Heummer and the Catholic women of Fond du Lac. Despite the prevailing Church doctrine on the subject, the Archbishop supported the idea of St. Mary’s Springs becoming a coeducational school, so long as certain conditions were met, and he agreed that it could open as such in September of the same year. Less than two weeks later Archbishop Stritch penned one letter to Mother Aloysia and another to the local pastors of Fond du Lac.¹⁵ In those letters he explained that, although the official view of the church was that the sexes should be educated separately during the high school years, exceptions could be made when circumstances did not permit establishment of separate schools. Given the choice between a Catholic coeducational school and a secular coeducational school, there was no question which was preferred. The parents had adamantly asserted that they would rather send their boys to a parochial school than to a public high school. The basis of the argument by the parents was that, since Fond du Lac did not have a Catholic boys’ high school to which they could send their sons, why should they not be able to send them to

¹² Naber, 225.

¹³ Archbishop Samuel Alphonsus Stritch (1887-1958) served as Archbishop of Milwaukee from 1930 until 1939. He was made a Cardinal in 1946 served the people of Chicago from 1939 until his death, in Rome, in 1958.

¹⁴ The text of the Encyclical, “On the Christian Education of Youth: Methods of Co-education,” may be found in *Catholic Mind* XXVIII: 61-91, February 28, 1930, and in *Catholic Education Review* XXVIII, 129-64, March 1930.

¹⁵ See Appendices I and II for the text of the letters.

St. Mary's? The archbishop stated that, eventually, he would like to build a separate boys' high school in Fond du Lac. However once he agreed to make St. Mary's Springs a coeducational school, the Sisters of St. Agnes showed neither intention of building a second school at a different location nor of completely separating the students at Springs again, despite whatever initial reluctance they may have had.¹⁶

The pastors raised another key concern. They feared that the school would soon become overcrowded, because of increased enrollment that would result from admitting boys. Their prediction was realized in the early 1950s, and only at this time did the question of a second Catholic high school emerge again.

In the following few months, the Congregation of St. Agnes took rapid steps to meet the conditions set forth by the Archbishop. Among the preparations made was a visit with the Administrators of St. Catherine's High School in Racine, a Dominican Sisters-operated coeducational high school. Originally founded in 1864 as a girls' boarding school, St. Catherine's became an all-girls academy. In 1923, a new high school was built on the current site. At that time, a group of 8th grade boys from a neighboring parish visited the Mother Superior of the order and petitioned to be admitted to the new high school. Mother Ramona was so moved by their desire that she made the decision to admit boys, effective with the opening of classes in the fall of 1924.¹⁷ Leadership from St. Mary's Springs traveled to Racine at the end of May to observe how a Catholic co-educational school was conducted.

Alterations to the physical plant of St. Mary's Springs were made to accommodate the boys. The school's cafeteria was remodeled in the spring and was finished by August. The new project provided adequate facilities for the entire student body to eat at the same time. The former day-students' lunchroom was converted into a boys' department, complete with locker rooms, lavatories, study hall, and recreational quarters.¹⁸

In the summer of 1939, the school also underwent another dramatic change. Sister Angeline Kamp, who had been the Principal for 21 years, stepped down to become

¹⁶ Interview with Sr. Jeremy Quinn, CSA, March 8, 2004.

¹⁷ E-mail correspondence with St. Catherine's Principal Robert Miller, December 3, 2003.

¹⁸ Binder entitled "Springs News from the FDL Reporter," *Fond du Lac Reporter* August 1939, located at the St. Mary's Springs Archive.

the new Mother General of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes, after Mother Aloysia retired from that position.¹⁹ Sister M. Emma was the new Principal when school opened in the fall. She was not new to the school, however, for she had been on the staff for thirty years and had spent the previous fifteen years as Assistant Principal.²⁰

The first “boys’ day” at the school was August 31. Due to the activities planned, it appears as if this “boys’ day” was intended to act largely as a recruiting effort. Transportation was provided for the boys to the school. Activities such as swimming, water polo, tennis and other field games were at their disposal during the afternoon. Refreshments were scheduled in the new cafeteria, and the day’s activities were carried out without incident. The boys got their first taste of the school, with the official opening less than two weeks away.

A major concern of the Archbishop had been that the boys and girls should be chaperoned while being transported to and from the school. Separate transportation for the boys was secured when a third bus route to downtown was established. The freshmen and sophomore girls took the first bus, which was scheduled to arrive at 7:45. The junior and senior girls took the second bus and arrived at 8:05, while all the boys took the third bus and arrived at 8:30.²¹

With all the “proper precautions” stipulated by the Archbishop met, or exceeded in the case of the separate bus for boys, one of the last arrangements to be made was to invite Archbishop Stritch to celebrate a mass to commemorate the formal opening of school. Registration was set for September 11, and the opening mass and sermon were scheduled for September 13. All the pastors of Fond du Lac and the surrounding communities were invited for the day.

Oddly the Archbishop’s pastoral message at mass was unclear and did not reflect very well the character of the Springs, although the Archbishop did recognize the significance of the occasion. “Seldom has an archbishop made the opening of a school sufficiently important to come here and say mass,” he said. He went on to assert that in

¹⁹ Mother Angeline Kamp served as Marian College President from 1939 to 1951. She presided over the school’s first graduation ceremony in 1941 and was instrumental in establishing a nursing program at Marian College. At that time, the Mother General was automatically the President of Marian College.

²⁰ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, August 16, 1939.

²¹ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, September 11, 1939.

the past girls had been educated beyond the level attained by boys and that this had increased the number of mixed marriages, for boys and girls would seek their cultural equals in marriage.²² This much of his message was apt, but he then moved onto much less certain ground.

The training of the boy is the most important thing. Men are the protectors of women. This is true of every level of education, but preeminently true of the period of adolescence, of the high school period. When the Catholic boy and the Catholic man is educated, he will see to it that nothing is too good for the education of the Catholic boy.²³

As he continued, he talked about the “resolves” of youth, asserting that “In youth the highest resolves in life are made. Christopher Columbus first discovered America as a youth.” He then explained how he had come to that conclusion. A few years prior, Archbishop Stritich related that he had been invited to the Cathedral of Seville in Spain. There, he had been given access to the manuscript that Columbus had written. In it he found many marginal notes made by Columbus. These showed, the Archbishop claimed, that as a boy Columbus had very high resolves for the great work he later accomplished. Here, the Archbishop was on shaky historical ground. Columbus was born in 1451 in Genoa and sailed for the Indies in 1492, so he was already at least forty years old when he departed on his journey, and he was at least thirty-one years old when he proposed the “Enterprise of the Indies,” after he had returned from his trip to the Portuguese West African colony of Sao Jorge de Mina. He was hardly a youth, much less a boy.²⁴

The Archbishop continued, “In this school you will find Christ. The only friend that understands the problems of that time of life when the days are spent in “boy town.” Finally he reached the crux of his reasoning for authorizing coeducation at St. Mary’s Springs: “Economic conditions made it impossible to provide a separate high school for boys in Fond du Lac.” For that reason St. Mary’s Springs had been opened to the boys whose parents had broken down the doors for admission of the boys.

²² *SMS News*, October 1939.

²³ *SMS News*, October 1939.

²⁴ Delno West, “Christopher Columbus and His Enterprise to the Indies: Scholarship of the Last Quarter Century,” *William and Mary Quarterly*, XLIX:2, April 1992.

Apart from his dubious history lesson on Columbus, the message that the Archbishop sent was likely a surprise to the Sisters in attendance. He told the administrators at a school that had educated exclusively girls for thirty years that the education of the boy was the most important thing. He might have seemed to be devaluing the work that they had done for Catholic girls in the archdiocese since the school's inception and to be insinuating that only now was the school finally going to undertake a worthwhile endeavor. Much of the language used was of a sexist nature, although the culture of 1939 America certainly was less sensitive to this issue. The story of his trip to Seville was irrelevant either to the "resolves" of youth, or to the school's situation. The comment that only Christ understood the problems at "boy town," may also have puzzled those who attended and worked at the new coeducational school.

On a more practical level, the faculty meeting of September 9 had noted many of the concerns facing the school on the days before the arrival of the boys. Primarily, the young men who were joining a hitherto all-female community were likely to experience some anxiety. The minutes of the meeting reflected the Sisters' response to this concern:

Sisters are requested to be as kind as can be to the boys yet firm. Many of them feel that they are not prepared to go on with their work like the girls because of preliminary training. All who have met them this summer have assured them that we will all take a special interest in them. Since this is the first year that we are admitting boys, and since the priests are trying so hard to increase the number out here, and because of the good we can do, we should be as kind as possible, especially in the beginning, and make allowances wherever they can be made. Do not let them feel they can get by or lower the standard of the school, but be kind, especially with the boys.²⁵

This procedure, and some social policies introduced, had the effect of largely segregating the coeducational school by sex. The Sisters may have been trying to institute the Catholic ideal of educating the sexes separately, at least as much as possible. The third bus trip to pick up only the boys was just the first step in this process. When the students came to school to register, they did not register by class; instead they registered by gender. Boys registered in the homeroom, met the coach and Chaplain, and

²⁵ *Saint Mary's Springs Faculty Meeting Minutes, 1928-1951, September 9, 1939.*

received their needed instruction. Girls registered in the gym. It was suggested that boys should sit in the back of the class, but no resolution on that measure was passed.²⁶

Arrangements for the sexes to use separate stairways were enforced for only a short time. According to Sr. Margaret Lorimer, historian of the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes, the Sisters were trying to retain the Academy's culture as much as possible, but when the boys entered the school many things changed. After the Fond du Lac newspaper ran a story about the school mandating separate stairways for boys and girls, townspeople made jokes about the situation. Embarrassed by the comments, the school changed its policies so that the upper classmen used one set of stairs and the underclassmen the other set, at least as much as possible.²⁷

As the boys entered school, numerous extracurricular outlets were created for them. During the first school year, a boys' chorus was formed, as well as a boys' club. A basketball team was established that same year, and a football team the following year. In 1940 the Springs athletic program joined the Fox Valley Catholic Conference. The school was fully admitted to the Conference for the 1941-1942 season, although the basketball team had played the majority of its games against conference teams previously.²⁸

While the school was virtually segregated during the day, there were occasions that permitted the sexes to take part in extracurricular activities together. Three examples are described in the school newspapers that appeared during the first year of coeducation. A Christmas play was performed, "A Stranger Passes," that boasted an integrated cast.²⁹ A play in the spring, "Marcheta," that debuted in May 1940 also included a cast that included both boys and girls.³⁰ Previously in the school plays, females played the male roles; hence these two plays were the first in the school's history that involved a mixed cast. The third activity was the Junior-Senior prom held on May 7, but this was not an

²⁶ *Faculty Meeting Minutes*, September 9, 1939.

²⁷ E-mail from Sr. Margaret Lorimer CSA, March 19, 2004.

²⁸ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, November 1, 1940.

²⁹ *SMS News*, November 1939.

³⁰ *SMS News*, April 1940.

innovation, for such dances had been held at the school for at least two years already. Fifty-eight couples attended this particular prom.³¹

From all appearances, the school really abandoned its policy of semi-segregation of the sexes as early as the 1940-41 school year. A school band was established that had both male and female performers, and it gave its first public concert in December.³² There was also a mixed “Current Events Club,” which met on Fridays for discussions. The issue of concern in March 1941 was whether to give military aid to Great Britain.³³ A resolution to establish a student government was passed in the spring of 1941, and officers were elected in the fall, including both boys and girls.³⁴

The transition to a co-educational school did not proceed without a few minor conflicts. A disagreement between boys and girls appeared in the school newspaper in the waning months of 1939. One girl who wrote an anonymous editorial stated that “the boys” were receiving special treatment. Even though the girls wanted the boys there, she claimed, they did not want to become second-class citizens.³⁵ The anonymous rebuttal from “the boys” that appeared the next month admitted that they had been receiving special treatment, but their response asserted that they were not guilty of everything of which the girl had accused them. They noted that changes in the school occurred because of circumstances pertaining to their arrival, and those concerns were simply logistical, and not ideological.³⁶ Staff members weighed in on another matter in the December issue of the student newspaper, namely what was regarded as unacceptable behavior by the boys.

A recent book on behavior in public says, “The school building and all it contains should be treated with the greatest regard. The opportunity to enjoy these benefits is given to you through the generous attitude of somebody else. The least you can do is to take care of this equipment. Carving your initials on desks, overturning chairs, writing on walls, are all acts of vandalism causing needless destruction of property not your own.” In view of the fact that Sr. Emma has secured a pool table for

³¹ *SMS News*, June 1940.

³² *SMS News*, December 1940.

³³ *SMS News*, March 1941. The Lend-Lease Act was signed on March 11, 1941. Congress approved a \$50 billion appropriation, and \$31 billion eventually went to Great Britain.

³⁴ *SMS News*, June 1941, October 1941.

³⁵ See Appendix III for the full text.

³⁶ See Appendix IV for the full text.

the boys, it seems in place to remind them that they should heed what has been quoted above.³⁷

The issue of girls' resentment of apparent favoritism in treatment of the boys also appeared at the January 1940 faculty meeting, probably in response to the editorial in the student newspaper. "Because a complaint was made by the girls that the Sisters are partial to the boys, teachers are asked to be careful in this regard. The boys have had an opportunity now to become adjusted to the rules and regulations." Before the start of the 1940-41 school year, the faculty revisited this issue, in order to make sure the same situation did not plague the school for another year.³⁸ No other complaints appeared in the student newspaper after the "notice" was given to boys. Apparently the Sisters had had enough of trying to recruit boys to the school by being "nice" to them. They realized that they needed to retain order and control over the boys who were already enrolled in the school.

The separate bus routes for boys and girls ceased to exist by 1940. The school bought a new school bus, and it made only two trips to town each morning and each afternoon. Freshmen and sophomores took the first bus, and the juniors and seniors took the second bus.³⁹ The buses were chaperoned until 1969, for insurance reasons, according to Sr. Michaela O'Brien, and thus continued to meet the original stipulation made by Archbishop Stritch.⁴⁰

The St. Mary's Springs class of 1940 boasted thirty-four members, two of whom were boys. These two young men marked the beginning of a new era in the school's history, an era where boys and girls would attend class and graduate together. As the 1940s passed, enrollment at Springs continued to increase. By the end of World War II, the number of males enrolled exceeded one hundred, greatly increased from the original group of seventeen who had entered the school in the fall of 1939.

The school's reputation grew in the early 1940s as well. The North Central Association of Colleges and Secondary Schools accredited the Academy at a meeting

³⁷ *SMS News*, December 1939.

³⁸ *Faculty Meeting Minutes 1928-1951* January 1940.

³⁹ *SMS News*, October 1940.

⁴⁰ E-mail from Sr. Michaela O'Brien CSA, March 24, 2004.

held in Chicago in 1940. Examination and evaluation had taken place at the school in February 1940, with eleven administrators from various Wisconsin high schools brought in to evaluate its programs and facilities. The school received an “excellent” rating.⁴¹ The school still maintains that accreditation today.⁴²

As the prestige of the school increased, so did enrollment and the number of students who graduated.⁴³ The prediction of overcrowding that had been made by the Fond du Lac pastors to the Archbishop in 1939 began to come true as early as 1950. By then, the school graduated over one hundred students a year, and classes became overcrowded. To deal with the issue of overcrowding, the school began to turn away qualified applicants. Once more, Fond du Lac parents had a difficult time reconciling the idea that their children were being denied a Catholic secondary education, after Catholic teachings had been provided for their children throughout the primary education years. The issue finally came to a head in the early 1960s. By that time, Springs was turning away roughly half of its applicants, and it was graduating 150-200 students each year.

Adding to the enrollment of the school were students involved in the Aspirancy Program. This program permitted high school-aged girls to determine whether religious life was for them while they earned their high school diplomas. These students first enrolled at Springs in the fall of 1959, after St. Agnes High School, located at the former St. Agnes Convent on Division Street, closed in June 1958. In 1959 there were twenty-five aspirants enrolled throughout the school, but the numbers of these students enrolled in this program increased until 1963 when 102 Aspirants participated, and in 1964, when there were 98 Aspirants in the student body. The program declined after these two peak years, and it was terminated following the 1971 school year, but their presence no doubt helped trigger the Fond du Lac community concern over whether Saint Mary’s Springs would be available for their own children to attend.

Ironically, the decline in the Aspirancy Program had another effect that began to reduce the enrollment at Springs. Fewer and fewer Sisters entered the order. This was partially attributable to the many changes in the Church that took place after Vatican II,

⁴¹ *Fond du Lac Reporter*, March 31, 1941.

⁴² North Central Association Website - <http://www.ncacasi.org>. Accessed March 2004.

⁴³ See Appendix V for enrollment statistics.

although demographic and social changes in America probably lay at the root. In any event, as the number of Sisters began to decrease, the schools were forced to hire lay teachers, and this in turn led to higher tuition rates, which eventually had an adverse impact on enrollment.⁴⁴

Although in retrospect the peak in Springs enrollment was temporary, leaders in the Catholic community began to act. In 1962, enrollment reached an all-time high of 759. The next year, a letter was sent to local pastors regarding parental concern over the limited enrollment at the school. More than 2,000 area parents signed a petition requesting that a new boys' high school be built in town.⁴⁵ This venture was never endorsed, however, because the group seeking a new school was not ready to pay for it. Seeking a solution, the Sisters of St. Agnes offered first to donate the land where the football field and parking lot at Springs are located as a site for a co-institutional school, in which boys and girls would share only parts of the same building. A second proposal from the Congregation offered to provide the use of current facilities and to build an annex to the current school. Both of these solutions would have retained the essence of coeducation. The second offer proved too good to turn down and, when Archbishop William E. Cousins agreed to it, plans were made to build the current structure of St. Mary's Springs. Monsignor Riordan of St. Joseph's Parish sold a piece of property on South Park Avenue and donated the proceeds to help construct the new school.⁴⁶ This new building was completed before the end of the decade, and by the end of the century it housed the entire operations of the school. Clearly the Congregation had not seen its coeducational enterprise as a temporary stopgap, and it worked to assure that some form of coeducation would continue at St. Mary's Springs.

Official church policy on Catholic education, as well as many other Church practices, changed after Vatican II. Pope Paul VI issued his "Declaration on Christian Education" on October 18, 1965. Although this document did not explicitly change the previous policy articulated in the encyclical of Pope Pius XI in 1929, Pope Paul VI stated

⁴⁴ E-mail from Sr. Jeremy Quinn CSA, March 30, 2004.

⁴⁵ Binder entitled "SMS HISTORY," St. Mary's Springs Archive.

⁴⁶ E-mail from Sr. Michaela O'Brien CSA, March 24, 2004. Archbishop William E. Cousins (1902-1988) served from 1959 until 1977 as Archbishop of Milwaukee.

that, since the role of Catholic schools is to aid in the fulfillment of the mission of the people of God, the Church has the right to freely establish and conduct schools of every type and every level.⁴⁷ No discussion of coeducation *per se* appears in the document, but it can be inferred, given the fact that the “Declaration on Christian Education” states that any school can be both established and conducted. In any event, the Congregation was clearly in the vanguard of the Catholic Church concerning changing Church policy on coeducation.

St. Mary’s Springs continued to strive to meet its mission of quality Catholic coeducational secondary education for both boys and girls. Enrollment declined somewhat from the banner years of the early 1960s, maintaining high levels until the 1980s, when significant decline began. By 2002, enrollment was the lowest it had been since the end of World War II. In the early twenty-first century, the school competed for students against new public high schools in Fond du Lac, North Fond du Lac and Waupun, and also against rising tuition within the context of a struggling economy.

Efforts were made to upgrade facilities in order to keep pace with the competition. The cafeteria was reconstructed in the new building, and the gymnasium was renovated. The entrance lobby was remodeled in 2003 as well.

Despite recent enrollment struggles, in 2004 young men and women still walk the halls of St. Mary’s Springs and attend classes together. For that circumstance, they have to thank the parents of the young men of 1939, the leadership of the Sisters of St. Agnes and the flexibility of the Archdiocese of Milwaukee for the opportunity to receive coeducation in a Catholic High School in Fond du Lac. The words of Pope Pius XI notwithstanding, Catholic coeducation at St. Mary’s Springs has been neither “false [nor] harmful to Christian education.” Instead, it has provided a significant instance in which the Congregation of the Sisters of St. Agnes worked to better the Fond du Lac community and the lives of the people of the city.

⁴⁷ Declaration on Christian Education, Proclaimed by Pope Paul VI October 28, 1965. Vatican archives www.vatican.va.

Appendix I: Letter from Archbishop Samuel A. Stritch to Mother Aloysia

May 24th, 1939:

My Dear Mother General,

Your good Sisters at St. Mary's Springs Academy, Fond du Lac, have informed me that in your deep interest in promoting Catholic education in the Archdiocese, your generous offer to assist me by opening your High School at Fond du Lac to Catholic boys.

It is true that the Catholic ideal in High School education insists that there be separate schools for the Catholic boys and the Catholic girls. In his Encyclical Letter on "Christian Education of Youth" Pope Pius XI of happy memory, wrote: "False also and harmful to Christian Education is the so called method of "coeducation."⁴⁸ This too by many of its supporters is founded on naturalism and the denial of original sin by all upon a deplorable confusion of ideas that mistakes a leveling of promiscuity and equality for the legitimate association of the sexes. The Creator has ordained and disposed perfect union of the sexes only in matrimony, and with varying degrees of contact in the family and in society. Besides there is not in nature itself, which fashions the two quite different organisms, in temperament, in abilities, anything to suggest that there can or ought to be promiscuity, and much less equality in the training of the sexes. These in keeping with the wonderful designs of the Creator are destined to complement each other in the family and in society, precisely because of their differences which therefore ought to be maintained and encouraged with the necessary distinction and corresponding separation according to age and circumstances. These principles with due regard to time and place must in accordance with Christian prudence be applied to all schools, particularly in the most delicate and decisive period of adolescence. This is the Catholic ideal to which we fully subscribe and which one-day we hope to see fully realized in the education of Catholic youths in the archdiocese.

We are however faced with a practical question, the answering of which will not brook delay until at some future date, at this time recognized by all as distant, we shall be able to provide separate high school education for our boys and girls. We have underscored certain words in our quotation from the above cited Encyclical letter which clearly indicate that the Church makes due allowances for the practical impossibility of realizing this ideal in certain

⁴⁸ Encyclical of Pope Pius XI on Christian Education of Youth, December 31, 1929.

circumstances and invoked prudence as the guide of action of Church Authority in these circumstances.

Our problem may be very simply stated. Presently Catholic boys at Fond du Lac and its environs frequent public high schools, which are coeducational. Would it not be better in view of the utter present impossibility of erecting there a Catholic Boys High School to suffer at least for the time coeducation in a Catholic High School, that to refuse our boys every opportunity of Catholic High School Education? Catholic parents, who enjoy special supernatural lights in providing for the education of their children and rightly may be our guides in this matter, give the answer. They have asked that you admit their boys into your High School, which heretofore has been restricted to girls. Experience shows how great are the benefits to Religion, which flow from Catholic coeducational high schools in circumstances which do not permit the erection of separate institutions. God in his goodness in such circumstances comes to our aid and marvelously there disappear the inconveniences and drawbacks, which it would seem at first thought, are inseparably bound up with coeducation in adolescence. These Catholic coeducational high schools not only are freer from dangers for our youth than the secular schools, but actually, through the special gifts of God to those, who try in difficult circumstances to rear Catholic youth, they succeed in founding safely adolescence on the firm basis of Christian truth and morals. It is no wonder therefore that the Catholic sense of parents in the matter of rearing their youths should prompt them to prefer a thousand times Catholic coeducational high schools to secular coeducational high schools and that should demand of us with the assertion of right that where we have girls high schools and no high schools for boys, we should open these schools also to boys.

You are doing a blessed thing and you are extending coveted help to us in volunteering to open your High School at Fond du Lac to both Catholic boys and girls. It is with a great deal of true pleasure that I give you the necessary permission and even ask you to do this thing until sometime in the future we may be able to provide separate high school facilities for boys and girls at Fond du Lac or its environs. We have spoken with several of the pastors of Fond du Lac and its neighborhood on this matter and they approve wholeheartedly this undertaking saying indeed that as a consequence of it, in a few years your present high school facilities will be overcrowded.

In your fatherly solicitude for the youths of our flock we ask you before opening this school to both the sexes, you make sure that the following regulations be observed.

- 1) Arrangements must be made in the buildings properly to take care of the particular needs of both the sexes in a becoming matter
- 2) In physical education and all athletic activities, there will be instituted the most rigid separation of the sexes, a male instructor in physical education and in the direction of athletic activities being engaged by you.
- 3) In transporting students to the school in your school buses and from the school back to their homes, there must be provided a proper trustworthy chaperon.
- 4) Your Reverend Chaplain will assume the duty of acting as Faculty Advisor or in our terms Spiritual Advisor for the boys, and give great care to their manly Christian training.
- 5) To maintain close contacts between the students and their pastors, a copy of the report cards of students will be sent at least twice during the school year to their respective Reverend Pastors and their Pastors will be invited frequently to call at the school and inform themselves on the progress of their youths. Since particularly speaking, a good Catholic is a good parishioner; every effort will be made by the school to encourage the students to take part in the activities of the parishes.

We are this day writing to the Reverend Pastors of Fond du Lac and its environs announcing this new policy of your school and asking them to give it their generous encouragement and support.

With Blessing,
Samuel A. Stritch
Archbishop of Milwaukee ⁴⁹

⁴⁹ “Correspondence with the Archbishop regarding Co-Ed Academy 1939,” St. Mary’s Spring Archives.

**Appendix II: Letter from Archbishop Samuel A. Stritch to the Reverend Fathers of
the Catholic Area Parishes.**

Dear Reverend Father,

In your pastoral solicitude for the youths of your flocks you have frequently lamented to me over the absence in your neighborhood of any facilities for the Catholic high school education of your boys and some of you have not hesitated to say to me that what you do for your boys in your Grade Schools is in large measure undone to them in the atmosphere of secularistic High Schools.

Fortunately at Fond du Lac the good Sisters of St. Agnes have conducted a High School for Girls, which has done a holy work and afforded at least to many Catholic girls the advantages of Catholic high school education. For boys it has long been my desire and my hope to erect at Fond du Lac a Catholic Boys High school, so that with separate High Schools for our boys and girls we might be able to realize in its perfection the Catholic ideal of the education of adolescents. But, my dear Father, we must be realistic and very practical in our Sacred Ministry. The fact is that there is no hope in the near future of a Boys High School and for conducting it. Our heart has been heavy over not being able to offer our boys in that part of the Archdiocese wider high school opportunities than Catholic Boarding Schools afford and the one-year of High School laudable taught at one of the Parish Schools. Year after year we have seen these boys of ours go out from our schools into secularistic coeducational high schools.

Of late we were very much edified when we learned that not only we and you were worried over this state of affairs but that it was also a source of great worry to many Catholic parents. Now we know that God, through the Sacrament of Matrimony, gives to Catholic parents special lights and helps in providing for the Christian training of their children. Experience shows that with these lights and helps they have frequently solved educational problems, which baffled Church Authority. This same thing has happened again. These parents in goodly number have asked that St. Mary's High School for girls be opened to boys and they have asked it so insistently that the good Sisters of St. Agnes, always responsive to the needs of Religion, have said that they will open their Girls' High School in September also to boys, if we give the necessary permission and the Reverend Pastors of Fond du Lac and its environs look graciously on this new policy.

We have spoken to several of the Reverend Pastors who have wholeheartedly approved this proposal and we know that the

others, in their zeal for souls, will greet it equally with whole-hearted approval.

Therefore, we have given the Sisters permission to accept, under proper safeguards, boys into their St. Mary's High School and to conduct this school as a coeducational institution until such time as conditions will permit the better thing, the provision of separate high schools for boys and girls.

St. Mary's High School will accept boys for its Freshman Class in September at the same transportation and tuition rates now in force for girls.

We ask you to commend this School to Catholic parents and to explain to them that the sacrifice which the education of their youths in Catholic High Schools may impose will yield them a return, which human hands cannot calculate.

With Blessing,
Samuel A. Stritch,
Archbishop of Milwaukee⁵⁰

⁵⁰ "Correspondence with the Archbishop regarding Co-Ed Academy 1939," St. Mary's Springs Archives.

Appendix III: Editorial

Scratch! Scratch! Scratch! The fingernails attempting to dig into the school newspaper were heard by a couple of girls as they walked into the gym.

“You look like a couple of cats.” One of them said, “What did that paper do to you?”

“I just don’t like what’s in it” One of the girls said.

“I don’t see anything wrong with it.”

But the thing that really was wrong was that there was too much in it about the “boys”. It isn’t that we don’t want to give our boys a place in the paper, but almost every item contained the word “boys”.

We girls wonder why the “boys” should get so much attention. Do you suppose the change in the bus schedules have anything to do with the “boys”?

The boarder’s study hall in the afternoon looks like a wardrobe just because the “boys” occupy the gym and make it impossible for the girls to get their wraps after school.

In the chapel, instead of taking their turn, the “boys” leave right after the services, while the girls move along very slowly so that the “boys” can get out first (ladies before gentlemen).

Did you ever go down the hall and notice that the “boys” were really passing quietly and in orderly fashion? But why argue about it? There isn’t anything the girls can do about it, or is there?⁵¹

⁵¹ *SMS News*, November 1939.

Appendix IV: Letter to the Editor

In the last issue of the school paper an editorial appeared in this column which stated that the boys received all the so called "breaks". Whether or not this statement is true will create somewhat of an intensely interesting but friendly 'feud.' At the outset we wish to admit that we have been getting a few breaks from the Sisters. We do not however plead guilty to all the accusations brought against us.

We wish to inform the girls that we do not have as much space as they do in the paper. The boys have nothing on the first page, about 11 inches on the second page, 47 ½ on the 3rd page and a small sum of 4 ½ inches on the last page. This totals up to 63 inches, which is ¼ of the space in the whole paper. These statistics were taken from the second issue of the *News*.

The alteration of the bus schedule was necessitated by the fact that there is basketball practice every evening, and many night games. If it had not been changed the girls would have been forced to ride with the boys. Now you wouldn't want that would you?

The girls must not have very much school spirit if they begrudge the boys the gym after school. Furthermore, the boarders now have a place in their study hall to put their wraps in the afternoon.

During the first 9 or 10 weeks the boys did not pass very quietly or in a very orderly manner in the halls because they were not used to the discipline, but if the girls will kindly open their eyes, they will notice that the males are very orderly now.

Before the 'coming of the boys' favors and privileges were enjoyed by the girls, free and unrestricted use of the gym and tennis courts, and liberal access to the campus. Now can it be that the girls, realizing that they no longer enjoy exclusive rights, have begun to foster a slightly biased spirit toward the boys?

The boys sincerely hope this is not the case, for it would destroy the possibility for teamwork so necessary this year when foundations are being laid for a co-educational institution of high achievement.⁵²

⁵² *SMS News*, December 1939.

Appendix V: St. Mary's Springs Enrollment, by Year⁴⁹

1909 - 37	1928 - 93	1947 - 405	1966 - 625	1985 - 562
1910 - 37	1929 - 120	1948 - 429	1967 - 624	1986 - 531
1911 - 47	1930 - 136	1949 - 451	1968 - 623	1987 - 484
1912 - 48	1931 - 132	1950 - 466	1969 - 593	1988 - 451
1913 - 60	1932 - 108	1951 - 471	1970 - 596	1989 - 376
1914 - 64	1933 - 100	1952 - 481	1971 - 542	1990 - 332
1915 - 54	1934 - 103	1953 - 520	1972 - 597	1991 - 310
1916 - 70	1935 - 110	1954 - 506	1973 - 618	1992 - 315
1917 - 37	1936 - 139	1955 - 537	1974 - 614	1993 - 315
1918 - 72	1937 - 147	1956 - 581***	1975 - 644	1994 - 342
1919 - 87	1938 - 135	1957 - 629	1976 - 653	1995 - 310
1920 - 97	1939 - 150**	1958 - 714	1977 - 632	1996 - 319
1921 - 84	1940 - 170	1959 - 695	1978 - 695	1997 - 350
1922 - 75	1941 - 204	1960 - 702	1979 - 666	1998 - 373
1923 - 62	1942 - 191	1961 - 691	1980 - 604	1999 - 386
1924 - 65	1943 - 231	1962 - 759	1981 - 533	2000 - 368
1925 - 67	1944 - 294	1963 - 723	1982 - 519	2001 - 305
1926 - 61	1945 - 350	1964 - 684	1983 - 550	2002 - 276
1927 - 66*	1946 - 398	1965 - 648	1984 - 500	

*First Day students enrolled.

**Coeducation introduced.

***Boarding School eliminated

⁴⁹ Enrollment figures vary among different sources.

**The Shaping of a Mission:
The Sisters of Saint Agnes in Nicaragua, 1945-1960
Eric Czyzewski**

Missionary work has always been an important feature of the Roman Catholic Church. For the last two millennia, missionaries have witnessed in Europe, Africa, Asia, and more recently the Americas and Australia. In general, most missionaries have difficult obstacles to overcome. Each Roman Catholic mission is a story within itself; some just make better stories than others. People and geographic locations are all different, but the goal is similar: to share and show God's love to the “less fortunate.” What is often forgotten or neglected in such stories is the way in which missionaries may unknowingly be changed themselves through their actions.

The mission to Nicaragua initiated by the Congregation of Saint Agnes at the end of World War II is notable due to the Sisters who began the work, the people to whom they gave aid, and the problems they struggled to overcome together. The work of these women demonstrates patterns of development in mission thinking and practice, and it illustrates some problems that Americans faced in understanding a wider world and that Catholics faced in reinterpreting their faith during the decades after World War II. Changes in America, the Catholic Church, Nicaragua, and the Agnesians themselves are important factors in understanding the Agnesian mission in eastern Nicaragua. Initially the mission reflected the naive and paternalistic ideology of America and the Catholic Church of the time, but that point of view changed through acceptance of cultural differences and use of teamwork to achieve a greater sense of equality with an indigenous people of Nicaragua, the Miskito Indians.

The Congregation of Sisters of Saint Agnes, founded at Barton, Wisconsin, in 1858, moved from Barton, Wisconsin to Fond du Lac in 1870. The move strengthened the Congregation's links to the Capuchin order and stimulated an increased interest in missionary activity. Decades later, this linkage grew to include a shared interest in foreign missions between Agnesian Sisters and Capuchin priests.

In the 19th century, Catholicism remained Eurocentric, rule-bound, and paternalistic, and missionaries sought to transform “natives” into their own image. By the time the Nicaraguan mission developed, Catholic missionaries, and Americans in general,

were becoming less naïve about the world and more aware that not everyone wanted to be “just like them,” but the older attitudes were still persistent. Agnesians already had experience interacting with diverse groups within the United States. They were working with Capuchins in New York City at Our Lady of Angels School, and at Sacred Heart School in Yonkers, New York. The Holy Family in the Bronx was yet another undertaking in New York. Collaboration also took place with the Saint Augustine Province in Hays, Kansas, Altoona, Pennsylvania, and other places. But the Nicaraguan mission was the first foreign mission for the Agnesians.

The Spanish Civil War of 1936-1939 provided an opportunity for American Capuchins to start work in Nicaragua as missionaries in 1939, due to the weakening of resources in Spain, the traditional source of missionaries in Latin America, especially a decline in the number of Spanish priests available for foreign mission work.¹ Religious from other areas needed to be found to fill this gap. The peculiar circumstances of Eastern Nicaragua, with its heritage of ties to the English-speaking world and the Caribbean made it a natural place for such an enterprise.

For a relatively small country of 4.8 million people roughly the size of Wisconsin, Nicaragua displayed a considerable diversity among its inhabitants. In particular, many differences divided the East and West Nicaraguan Coasts. Separated by mountains and jungle from the bulk of Nicaragua, the Caribbean lowlands lie in the East and are the home of the Miskito, Creole, as well as Mestizo ethnic groups.² The Pacific lowlands and Central highlands are mainly inhabited by Mestizo people and others of European descent. The geographic separation of the East and West Coasts of Nicaragua had both political and religious ramifications. For example, most of the 70,000 Miskito Indians are nominal Protestants. While the Spanish left their influence in the West on language and Catholic religion, British protectorates in the East brought Protestantism and the English language. Because of Bluefields’ East Coast location and British influence, English is the primary language in the town, with Miskito and Spanish spoken as secondary languages.

¹ *Sandal Prints*. Bluefields Mission Anniversary XII:2 Sept.-Oct. (Detroit, Michigan: Catholic Press Association), 7.

² The Creoles of Nicaragua are described as “of African descent,” and the Mestizo are a mix of Indian and Spanish ancestry.

Although Catholicism is the dominant religion in Nicaragua, there are significant numbers of Episcopalians, Anabaptists, and even Jews. One of the Anabaptist groups, the Moravians claims the largest percentage of the East Coast Miskito population. The East Coast includes roughly 20 per cent of the total population of Nicaragua, but numbers are rising due to an influx of Mestizos into the area.

Catholic mission activity in Eastern Nicaragua had already been established for decades before the Agnesian mission began. On December 2, 1913, Pope Pius XI issued a decree that established a new missionary territory, the Vicariate of Bluefields in Nicaragua, which he entrusted to the Spanish Capuchins. The Bluefields mission covered about forty per cent of the entire Republic of Nicaragua. Pope Pius chose Bluefields as the center of the work in the eastern half of Nicaragua because the coastal town was the largest in the region (8,000 people). Waspam, where the Agnesian Sisters first set up their clinic and school, was the heart of Miskito Indian territory in the northeastern corner of Nicaragua on the Rio Coco. Due to its geographical position and lack of communication, the region was cut off from Catholic influences from the West Coast, including the capital, Managua. Indeed the region had only been integrated into Nicaragua in 1896. There has been no noticeable tension between the Catholics and Moravians on the East Coast. In fact, there has been cooperation between the Moravians and Agnesians in Bluefields. The Bluefields mission entered the hands of American Capuchins on October 12, 1938, when the Capuchin Province in Detroit was entrusted with the region. Thus, North American Catholics began their religious influence in Eastern Nicaragua.³

Pope Pius XI (1922-1939), known as “Pope of the Missions,” actively engaged in shaping modern mission activities and philosophies. His work included many changes to the missions, including the Bluefields missions.⁴ A major goal was to promote education of native religious, evident in Bluefields. Active later in the Agnesian mission, for example, were Sister Mary Terisita Inés Argüello and Sister Mary Rosa Inés Silva, from

³ *Sandal Prints*, 1.

⁴ Antonio Galli and Domenico Grandi, *The Story of the Church*, (Garden City, New York: Image Books, 1966), 311-3.

Bluefields and San Marco respectively. Both women applied for admission to the Agnesian Order in 1948, both professed their vows in Fond du Lac, and both later taught at Waspam.⁵

In 1924, Pope Pius requested five Capuchin priests from Spain to work in the new Vicariate, after years in which many Spanish priests had been persecuted and ousted from Nicaragua. Spanish Reverend Agustin Bernaus y Serra was the first Bishop of Bluefields, serving until 1930.⁶ Reverend Serra had many years of experience as a missionary. In 1915, Fray Diego de Barcelona had been the first Capuchin to work among the Miskito Indians. Speaking of “these neglected people,” he said “It’s the work of God that we do not abandon them.”⁷ He was one of many who thought of the “natives” as children for the Church to convert and change, rather than as equals in the struggle through life. In 1925, Pope Pius XI organized the great Missionary Exhibition in Rome in order to highlight the success of missionaries in “reconquering” areas for Christ and to emphasize the massive problems connected with their work. Coinciding with the Dollar Diplomacy and military interventionism of American diplomatic ideology in 1925, Catholic leaders were only beginning to take time to accept that the “natives” did not necessarily want to be changed. For example, while Pius XII consecrated native bishops throughout the world, there was no native Nicaraguan bishop in Bluefields, nor would there be for years after the Agnesian mission began.⁸

One of the first Capuchin Americans, Matthew Niedhammer, had arrived in Bluefields, the largest town on the eastern coast of Nicaragua in 1939 as a missionary, and he later became the third Vicar Apostolic and first American to take the post as bishop on September 21, 1943.⁹ Niedhammer's consecration in Nicaragua was significant because it indicated that Pius believed Bluefields needed an outsider, whereas he promoted indigenous leadership elsewhere. One explanation could be that the Latin American missionaries were young compared to those in Asia. It is also quite possible he

⁵ Fr. Gregorio Smutko, *La Presencia Capuchina, entre los Miskitos, 1915-1995*, (Caragre, Costa Rica: Hecho el Deposits Legalartes Graficas, 1996), 130. Sister Vera Naber, *With All Devotedness: Chronicles of the Sisters of Saint Agnes*, (New York: P. J. Kenedy & Sons, 1959), 261.

⁶ *Sandal Prints*, 4.

⁷ Smutko, 71.

⁸ Galli and Grandi, 311.

⁹ *Sandal Prints*, 6.

took this action because the United States was becoming important not only in world politics but within Catholicism as well, thus indicating an increase in American political and economic influence in the area. Nicaragua had, after all, been occupied by United States Marines almost continuously from 1912 until 1933, and the United States continued to exercise enormous influence. And of course most Nicaraguan Catholics had a Hispanic and Managua-focused heritage that was likely to make them suspect among Anglophone Bluefields elites.

Bishop Niedhammer's own development helps explain his involvement with the Agnesians in the Waspam mission. A New Yorker, Bishop Niedhammer was born September 21, 1901 and attended Our Lady Queen of Angels School, a Capuchin Parish where several Agnesian Sisters taught. Mother Angeline Kamp, Mother Superior of CSA in 1945, had once been the school's principal.¹⁰ It was therefore natural that he turned to these same Sisters in his quest for teachers, and this was the reason that Agnesians were invited to Bluefields.

Fulfilling Bishop Niedhammer's request meant an expansion of the Agnesian missions. American Capuchin Bishop Niedhammer sought to get even more Americans involved in what had been a primarily Spanish missionary region. Most missions around the world were still European in origin and were conducted by international orders. As a religious order, the Congregation of Saint Agnes is unusual in that it does not have headquarters in Rome and is autonomous. By the 1940s, more American orders were maturing and involving themselves in the world scene. But initial American efforts seemed to mirror European paternalism.

Although the Agnesian Sisters had the distinction of being the first women from Wisconsin to run a foreign mission, there has been considerable involvement in domestic and foreign missions by female orders from Wisconsin.¹¹ The Dominican Sisters have traveled nation-wide doing missionary work, primarily in education. The Sisters of Our Lady of Charity of Refuge, in Green Bay, were invited to Buffalo, New York, to help local girls with guidance. Later, on the world scene, the School Sisters of Notre Dame,

¹⁰ Naber, 258.

¹¹ Rev. L. Rummel, *History of the Catholic Church in Wisconsin*, (Madison, Wisconsin: Knights of Columbus, 1976), 155-162.

Mequon Province, went to Paraguay in December 1966, after an invitation by Reverend William E. Cousins, Archbishop of Milwaukee. The School Sisters did not run this mission, but they contributed much needed aid as support workers. More recently, the Schoenstatt Sisters of Mary, originally from Germany, went to the Dominican Republic in 1973 on an educational mission.

At the same time that the Agnesians were invited to Bluefields, the Maryknoll Sisters from New York, another order of American nuns, was also asked to work with the Capuchins and Miskito people. Although the Maryknoll Sisters were an international order and had foreign missions in countries such as China, the Sisters who traveled to Nicaragua were all Americans. In 1944, the Maryknollers went to Managua.¹² Bishop Niedhammer wrote about the Maryknoll Sisters and their progress to Mother Angeline to explain what the Agnesians might experience in Nicaragua.¹³ Paralleling what the Agnesians aimed to do in Bluefields, the Maryknollers established a clinic, a school, and provided spiritual guidance. The Maryknoll Sisters left Nicaragua to pursue other missions on December 15, 1968.

Niedhammer wanted the two groups to follow the same basic guidelines, but he sought to stake out separate territories for them. He preferred their respective missions to remain separate because he feared the missions becoming too entangled in each other's affairs. Geographic separation by distance and mountains helped maintain this autonomy. The Maryknoll and Agnesian Sisters did communicate every few months in order to smooth the way for the Agnesians' arrival.¹⁴ One member of the Congregation, Sister Mary Agnes, went to the Maryknoll Congregation to consult them about necessary arrangements and obtained the good advice that Agnesians should stay with Madre Francesca in Managua for a few weeks upon their arrival, just as the Maryknollers had done.¹⁵ Madre Francesca, a Spanish member of the Asuncion order, familiarized the Agnesians with local customs, helped them adjust living conditions in Nicaragua, and

¹² Sr. Mary Francis Louise, *Maryknoll Sisters, A Pictorial History*, (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., 1962).

¹³ Archives of Congregation of Sisters of St. Agnes, Foreign Mission File, Bishop Niedhammer Folder, 1944-1970, Letter of September 22, 1944.

¹⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969. Letter of January 17, 1945.

¹⁵ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Bishop Niedhammer Folder, Letter of March 5, 1946.

provided some instruction in Spanish, especially much needed speaking practice in the language.¹⁶

Was it merely the accident of Bishop Niedhammer's roots that led to the Agnesians being asked to go to Nicaragua? Besides parochial ties to the Capuchins and their Rule, modified by a Capuchin, as well as his early education in Our Lady of Angels, Bishop Niedhammer saw in this Congregation a highly motivated and capable group of women who were enthusiastic for such an endeavor. Their interest in education was well known to him, and mission schools were a major priority for him.

The Congregation itself had matured in many ways by the 1940s. They had grown to eight hundred members and worked in many parishes in the Eastern and Midwestern regions of the United States. From their headquarters in Fond du Lac, the women conducted 41 parochial schools, ran four hospitals, two orphanages, one college, an academy, a home for the aged, and a home for travelers. It is not surprising that Niedhammer believed that this congregation was bound to have a few members capable and willing to begin a foreign mission.¹⁷

The Bishop's first invitation came in April 1941, prior to his episcopate, and another invitation to work with the Miskito Indians in Nicaragua came from Father Theodosius Foley, OFM Cap. on August 21, 1942.¹⁸ Nothing was set in motion at this time, but fresh approaches by the newly appointed bishop led to reflection, prayer, and careful discussion by the General Council of the Congregation and a delayed acceptance of the invitation on January 3, 1945. A major reason for delay, of course, was American entry into World War II. Finances, building materials, medical supplies, and other various supplies or materials were very difficult to come by in a country mobilizing for war. Permission even to build Saint Agnes hospital in Fond du Lac was very difficult to get, and the Congregation could not imagine trying to get permission for supplies for a foreign mission from the Board of Priorities, a federal committee set up to allocate American resources during wartime.

¹⁶ Naber, 259.

¹⁷ Bishop Matthew Niedhammer, "The Sisters of St. Agnes Come to Nicaragua," *The Cowl*, Vol. 10, (1946), 54.

¹⁸ *Annals of the Congregation of St. Agnes*, CSA Archives.

The order's preparations for accepting the mission actually began in April 1941 when Sisters Vera and Emma, two leaders at the time, went to Milwaukee to get information about procedures for entering a foreign mission field.¹⁹ The women concluded that the expenses involved would, to a great extent, have to be borne by the Congregation itself. Two weeks later a General Council meeting was held to discuss the contract drawn up by the Capuchin Fathers.²⁰ On December 10, 1941 the General Council made a preliminary decision to send a missionary in September 1943, a date that could not be met as World War II was still unfolding. It was at first expected that only one volunteer would probably participate.²¹ Continuous correspondence concerning the contract and finances during in 1944 paved the way for formal acceptance.²² Communication with the Maryknoll Sisters during 1944 was useful in learning how to prepare for Nicaragua.

Another major reason for the delay was a shortage of available nuns, given the order's many other commitments. A questionnaire was used by the General Council to select the four women who eventually went to Bluefields, and there was no lack of volunteers, for ninety-two women filled out the questionnaire. But the General Council's rationale for limiting the number of missionaries to four was that the Congregation could barely provide sufficient workers for their existing activities.²³ Thus it was decided that only four Sisters could be spared to go in the initial group, although two others joined the mission two years later.

There is some evidence that the Agnesians were reluctant to undertake this mission. It has been noted that Bishop Niedhammer needed to make repeated requests to obtain the Congregation's help. His persistence paid off. Through his continuous letters of persuasion to Mother Angeline, the Bishop finally convinced the Agnesians to head to Nicaragua for missionary work with the Miskito Indians of the Waspam region.²⁴ His final success must have pleased the Bishop, for he later wrote to Mother Angeline "I must

¹⁹ *Annals*, CSA Archives, April 11, 1941.

²⁰ *Ibid.*, April 24, 1941.

²¹ *Ibid.*, December 10, 1941.

²² *Annals*, CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Sister Francis Borgia Correspondence, File 1, undated.

²³ CSA Archives, June 8, 1945.

²⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Bishop Niedhammer Folder, 1944-1970.

let it be known to heaven and on earth that it was I who convinced Mother Angeline that the Sisters of Saint Agnes who have been so close to the Capuchins ever since their foundation must not desert us in the first missions entrusted to us in Nicaragua.”²⁵

Nicaragua has dealt with many changes of direction in its economic and political development in the twentieth century, particularly due to political instability and changing dictators. Constant turmoil and poverty were the catalysts for political uncertainty. Many Miskito Indians were apathetic toward these continuous changes in government in far-away Managua. Most of the time they were unaffected by the changes, especially in matters of religion, at least until the Sandinista regime came to power in the 1980s. A Catholic perspective was that religion might become a stabilizing factor through moral guidance where politics failed.²⁶ A Capuchin priest once said that Miskito Indians do not plan for tomorrow, because there is little change in their lives, even throughout the decades.²⁷ Actually, according to the Spanish priest, the Miskito knows that tomorrow will be the same as today, which provided just as little hope as the previous day. The missionaries' goal was that faith in Christ would change many Miskitos feelings to optimism about their future rather than perceived hopelessness. Miskitos would learn that someone cared about them and that they could have a future through health improvements and education. Had the Sisters not learned that they as well as the Miskito must change, this probably never would have been accomplished.

This first experience for both the American Capuchins and the Agnesian Congregation from Wisconsin excited all of those involved, but of course they were not the first Catholic missionaries in Nicaragua. The Moravians were strong among the Miskito Indians, but Roman Catholicism had dominated Nicaraguan religious life since the 16th century, due to Spanish power and priests, and the religion remained unchallenged until General José Santos Zelaya, a Liberal, took power from the Conservatives in 1893. Many Spanish priests were driven out after the anti-clerical Zelaya gained control. Zelaya sought to remove all outside influences from Nicaragua, particularly American paternalistic influence which could undermine his rule.

²⁵ Quoted in Naber, 258.

²⁶ Statement of the United States Catholic Conference on Central America, 1982.

²⁷ *Sandal Prints*, 45.

Early in his career, Zelaya had incited anti-American expressions nation-wide and threatened to revoke economic concessions granted to American businesses. These economic interests included the three million dollars paid for rights to build a canal in Nicaragua, which was never constructed due to Zelaya's opposition to the idea of an American controlled canal and to American success in engineering Panama's separation from Colombia.

Under President Taft's Dollar Diplomacy, American economic control over Nicaragua was exercised primarily by private investments from businesses like United Fruit Company. Government backing of these investments, however, stemmed from the view that America needed to be a father figure rather than an economic partner. American business and the federal government ended up exploiting Nicaragua and both benefited from the view that Nicaraguans were helpless and needed U.S. intervention to maintain stability. American influence was increasingly applied to the Nicaraguan government, and with a blend of diplomatic offensive, military strength, and American private capital, Zelaya's presidency was overthrown in 1909. This was just the beginning of American intervention. Americans perceived their economic interests to be threatened throughout the 1920s and 1930s. Despite the presence of American Marines, the United States gave little economic assistance to Nicaragua, compared to other Latin American countries. Nicaragua had less to offer economically than other Latin American countries, since it was one of the poorest nations in the world.

Although the United States had been politically at odds with Nicaragua, the Church and later American missionaries remained as uninvolved as possible in political diplomacy, concentrating on the individual Nicaraguans well being rather than the political system. Consequently, Nicaraguan officials tolerated, if cautiously, the American religious orders. America sent 2,600 Marines to Nicaragua when the 1912 civil war broke out, although the force was later reduced to four hundred. United States Marines sought to restore peace by their mere presence, which in turn would protect United States economic interests. By 1924, military occupation of another country had become unpopular in the United States, and Marines began to withdraw from Nicaragua. Revolution struck again, forcing the Marines to return in 1925, where they remained until

1933. The presence of Marines gave America some political clout through intimidation but in reality the troops did little except prevent another outbreak of civil war. Marine presence obviously had had an impact, because almost as soon as troops left in 1925 civil war broke out again.

United States Marines started what they thought to be their final withdrawal on August 3, 1925. The Sandino revolution, however, prolonged U.S. military involvement by eight years from the 1925 pull out. Had the Marines been present in thousands rather than a few hundred, they might have had an impact in stopping the Sandino revolution. This revolution was a citizen uprising led by General Augusto Cesar Sandino in 1927 against a Nicaraguan government that was backed by a small but formidable Marine force and the United States government. It is believed that Sandino was double-crossed under a flag of truce, ambushed, and killed by the National Guard in 1934, under the command of Anastasio Somoza. Terror and fear were unleashed upon the provinces where Sandino's support was strongest. Peasants were butchered and the cooperatives destroyed. Missionaries in the country at the time had little influence. They could do little to stop the government except beg for mercy on behalf of the accused. Although much fighting in the first half of the century took place in Bluefields, the Miskito people of the Wasparam region were fortunately unharmed and unaffected by most of the violence. Geographic isolation has kept the East Coast and West Coast regions from developing political continuity. The Bluefields vicariate was on the opposite side of the country from the capital, Managua, and the government paid little attention to the people in the area. Even after the Marines withdrew from Nicaragua, the Miskito were mostly left alone.

Motivation for final withdrawal in 1933 was President Franklin Roosevelt's "Good Neighbor Policy." The American government sought better relations with all Latin American countries. American politics still took a paternalistic view of the world, and Americans were naïve to the fact that no other country wanted foreign influences as strong as those that Americans were pushing upon them. The American people, including President Franklin Roosevelt, felt that having the United States Marine Corps camped out in Nicaragua was poor policy for a good neighbor. There were other reasons for the withdrawal: the Depression, strained United States resources, and the Marine Corps, not

designed for peacekeeping, were eager to pull out. On January 2, 1933, the last of the American soldiers left Nicaragua. This ended overt American military interference and political control.

“Stability” was now to come in a different form. In 1936, Anastasio Somoza, a Mason (historically a very anti-Catholic group) and one of the few non-Catholic Latin American dictators at the time, seized power. Without American military or political intervention to support his opponents, he was stronger than any Nicaraguan opposition for the presidency. At first Catholic missionaries remained uncertain about their future in Nicaragua. Three years later Somoza was “re-elected,” although never elected to his first term, and a new constitution was ratified. Little changed for the people of Eastern Nicaragua, partially due to Bishop Niedhammer. President Somoza turned out to be less anti-Catholic than had been anticipated, and he trusted Bishop Niedhammer implicitly, not only because of the Bishop’s reputation in Nicaragua but also because of his respect for the motto on Niedhammer's Coat of Arms, “that they may have life and have it to the full.”²⁸ In Niedhammer's view, Somoza tried to respect this concept during his rule. The understanding between the two men was respectful, congenial, and diplomatic. Consequently, the Somoza dictatorship did not interfere with the Agnesian mission. For example, to help with finances Somoza allowed the missionaries duty-free Christmas gifts via mail each year. The four missionaries were even able to meet President Somoza at a political rally. They were introduced to him and his wife and talked briefly. Saint Agnes missionaries had few qualms about him, for the Miskito people never posed a threat to Somoza, and so he never challenged the mission. Miskito apathy towards national politics kept them out of any role in the struggle to overthrow Somoza. Much of this benevolent treatment can be credited to Niedhammer's understanding with the dictator, an understanding that the missionaries at Bluefields respected. The Catholic Church retained a favored influence in Nicaragua and remains to this day the dominant religion. This was easy to accomplish for Catholics, since they represented roughly 75 per cent of the Nicaraguan population.

²⁸ *Annals*, CSA Archives, December 3, 1941.

In a country that recognized no official religion and had a troubled past with both the Catholic Church and United States, there remained much opportunity for involvement by American Catholics. Missionaries were successful in their work because they kept a low political profile. Missionaries were interested in changing the people, not the government. At first, that change was to “Americanize” and Christianize, but the role gradually took on more humanitarian goals that sought empowerment of the people.

Dramatic changes were taking place in the missionary scene of the world in the years after the Bluefields Vicariate was established in 1913. World Wars and a Depression had led many religious orders in America to remain at home. But the end of World War II freed resources for foreign missions. During the Depression, no orders in Wisconsin sustained missionary work abroad, for Depression-era mission work concentrated on rebuilding domestic parishes and assisting the unemployed and homeless in the United States. At the same time, the Catholic Church was worried about the spread of Communism. The Church feared Communism for its materialistic ideology, but also perhaps because Church leaders knew deep down that their own organization was in need of change, and the message of Communism presented an effective challenge. Such concerns remained private, however, and publicly the Catholic leadership in the United States saw itself as a community that aimed to defend and expand Catholic beliefs around the world, in the face of a newly perceived threat.²⁹ Overseas mission work became more popular in a newly outward-looking America that had become the leader of the “Free World” and an economic pacesetter. There was a national cry for peace and international cooperation in the early 1940s, and Wisconsin was no exception. Catholic leadership felt that religious character needed to be preserved, along with rights of free speech, press, and education, in the face of a threat to those ideals and that these beliefs needed to be extended abroad.

So spreading the faith was not only a religious calling; it had become political and economic, too. The United States wanted to maintain its sphere of influence, and the Communist U.S.S.R. was deemed to threaten American interests. For Catholics, association by any country with the atheistic and Communist Soviet Union seemed to

²⁹ G. Flynn, *Roosevelt and Romanism*, (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1976), 130.

threaten Catholicism religion in general, capitalism and democracy. By spreading Catholicism, the American Catholics hoped to protect and expand their way of life. Spiritual success was linked to economic and political success. Tragically, historical political relations between the United States and many Latin American nations had been disastrous. On the other hand, religiously, relationships had been relatively successful, even in the Moravian-dominated East of Nicaragua. The Church could lead the way as a bulwark for American values in Latin America. Patronizing attitudes of American diplomats and military commanders failed, whereas teamwork and respect might work for the missionaries. At first the Indians did not like to be told what to do; they did not want Americanization, but they realized the practical benefits of the health care and education the missionaries had to offer. The Indian Catholic population (including Miskito) had a history of strong faith even though it seemed a bit weak as seen through European or American eyes.³⁰ Capuchins and Agnesians wanted to change this perceived gap.

Bishop Niedhammer had outlined for the Agnesians what he considered to be the failings of the Miskito community in the mission statutes provided to the Sisters. Niedhammer listed child abandonment by one or both parents, poor education, competition among siblings for affection of parents, early initiation into sex, early responsibility in life, and lack of privacy as significant Miskito social problems.³¹ The Bishop also laid out a set of criteria for the Sisters who would participate in the mission. They should possess stability in character, youthfulness (age 25-33), an academic degree, and perpetual vows.³²

What the Bishop and Miskito Indians of Waspam received after much deliberation and careful thought were four Agnesian Sisters who were venturing into what was for them uncharted territory. Early in January 1945, the Sisters received yet another handwritten letter from Bishop Niedhammer requesting volunteers. Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff, Sister Mary Francis Borgia Dreiling, Sister Pauletta Scheck, and Sister Agnes Rita Fisette were selected by the General Council, based on ability and willingness to carry out the mission, as ascertained by their answers to a questionnaire. More than ten

³⁰ "Relatio Missionis de Bluefields 1950," *Analecta Ordines Fratrum Minorum Capuccinorum*, (Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1951), 225.

³¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Statutes Folder, undated.

per cent of the Sisters had returned the questionnaire volunteering their services, though few of the nuns could have identified Nicaragua without the aid of a map. Typical of nuns at the time, the four sisters selected had each entered the Congregation of St. Agnes in their early teens. Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff was originally from Marshfield, Wisconsin, born Lucy Dickoff on January 9, 1895. On August 31, 1910, she entered the Congregation of Saint Agnes. Sister Francis Borgia Dreiling, born Helen Dreiling on February 10, 1907 in Victoria, Kansas, entered Saint Agnes Convent (SAC) on August 4, 1921. Sister Agnes Rita Fisette, born Gertrude Fisette on November 24, 1916 in Dollar Bay, Michigan, entered SAC September 26, 1932. Sister Pauletta Scheck, born Regina Scheck on August 18, 1895 in Berman, Bavaria, Germany, entered SAC on December 6, 1913. Thus, all had been in the order for more than a decade.

The Sisters brought a variety of skills to their mission. Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff, who was a registered nurse at Saint Agnes hospital and a registered dietitian with a Bachelor of Science in nutrition and a Masters Degree from Marquette University, was to be in charge of nursing and health education and provide overall leadership. She received training in midwifery in Fond du Lac prior to departure. Sister Agnes Rita Fisette, the homemaker and the youngest of the four, was to cook and care for the Sisters' home. Sister Pauletta Scheck and Sister Francis Borgia were to teach.³³

Religious education, general education, and health were to be the main concerns of the nuns. Bishop Niedhammer and Mother Kamp had decided that it would be best at first to concentrate on care for physical illnesses through a clinic, in order to “reach the souls of their patients, “like missionaries of yore.”³⁴ At this time the Sisters had the idea that they would change the Miskito to Christian ways. Good spirits and prayer would help the women keep their own faith, while providing health and education, it was hoped, would lead the Miskito Indians to learn to have faith. Over time, the emphasis on education and health as a vehicle for building faith changed into an emphasis on humanitarian aid and encouragement for leadership among the Miskito. Health and education were important, but the Sisters thought that if the Miskito remained dependent

³² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mother Rosita Correspondence.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Naber, 258.

upon others, little would change in the daily life of the Indians. The slow rise of Indian leadership from their own ranks gave the missionaries hope.

Parting for the new adventure was an emotional affair. Each missionary was allowed a much-needed visit home before departure in order to say goodbye to friends and family and for spiritual support as they stepped out on their own as well. On August 16, 1945, these women left the Motherhouse in Fond du Lac for New Orleans.³⁵ When the Sisters left there was a big send-off. The Marian College community flooded the entrance stairs to bid goodbye to their peers as the four Sisters each received their symbolic Missionary Cross.³⁶ One Sister described the scene: “The venture filled the hearts of every Sister of CSA with joy, but the thought of a separation from loved ones, from and all that the heart holds dear brought tears to the eyes of all who gathered for the farewell.”³⁷ The nuns at Saint Agnes were so excited about their fellow Sisters going to Nicaragua that they helped them prepare and pack with much enthusiasm and care.³⁸ An earlier departure might have been arranged had it not been for teaching obligations of some.³⁹ The time from the official acceptance of the mission in January 1945 to the arrival at the mission site of Waspsam on December 20, 1945 also left ample time to organize and prepare the supplies. Packing and shipping supplies began as early as March 1945, so that most of their materials would be waiting for the Sisters on arrival.⁴⁰ Despite so much preparation, the Sisters were at times nervous about venturing into the unknown, for service by North American sisters in Central America was a novelty and almost unprecedented.

Parental permission needed to be granted before the women could leave for Nicaragua. This had been a stipulation by both Bishop Niedhammer and the Mother Superior to avoid any family conflicts.⁴¹ Passports took a few weeks to obtain, partially

³⁵ Mary Agnes Dickoff, CSA, Chronological Data of the Mission in Waspsam, September 15, 16, 17, 1945. Naber, 258, lists the departure date as September 12, the feast of the Holy Name of Mary.

³⁶ CSA Archives, Dreiling Historical Memoirs. NICA 1945-1977, 12-13.

³⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspsam Folder, 1945-1969, undated letter.

³⁸ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Pioneer Missionaries Folder.

³⁹ CSA Archives, Bishop Niedhammer, 1944-1970, October 5, 1944.

⁴⁰ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter from Sr. Mary Agnes, March 15, 1945.

⁴¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Pioneer Missionaries Folder.

because of what seemed to be endless paperwork.⁴² To gain permission to work in Nicaragua for an extended period of time, the United States government required baptismal records, two passport pictures, a letter from the Mother Superior stating the reason for departing the United States, a \$10.00 fee, police records and fingerprints, a visa, and a health certificate.⁴³ Immunizations constituted a problem because doctors rarely administered them, and consequently health certificates took some time to obtain. Many shots were necessary for protection from typhoid, paratyphoid, yellow fever, smallpox, typhus fever, and tetanus.⁴⁴

Joking was often one way to lift one another's spirits. The original four missionaries often remarked in the beginning that they were chosen for the bishop because they were the “expendable ones.”⁴⁵ Good spirits helped keep the women's minds off the disease, poverty, poor health and difficulties in education they faced, as well as the fact that they were thousands of miles from home.

A drive from Fond du Lac to the Chicago airport started the sisters' journey. Once in the air, New Orleans was the next stop. Mother Angeline requested the Sisters of Charity in New Orleans to give the missionaries information and training on tropical diseases, particularly a course in parasitology by Doctor D'Antone of Tulane University and Doctor Walter of Louisiana State University. She considered that knowledge of parasitology would be extremely valuable in an area where various infections were endemic.⁴⁶ This knowledge helped in disease prevention and rudimentary care.

The four missionaries arrived in Managua, Nicaragua on September 21, 1945. Immediately, differences of culture, language, and class from what the Agnesian sisters had known in the United States made themselves felt. In particular, there was the matter of language. Bishop Niedhammer had stressed that as much Spanish as possible should be learned prior to the Sisters' arrival in Nicaragua.⁴⁷ A crash course by high school Spanish teacher Sister Claritine Weng was provided at the convent. Despite their best

⁴² *Ibid.*

⁴³ CSA Archives, Foreign Missions File, Bishop Niedhammer Folder.

⁴⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Missions File, Pioneer Missionaries Folder.

⁴⁵ CSA Archives, Foreign Missions File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs, 38.

⁴⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter from Sister Mary Agnes, undated.

⁴⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Bishop Niedhammer Folder, 1944-1970.

efforts, this was hardly an immersion experience, and the Sisters found the Spanish they had acquired to be nearly useless when they reached Nicaragua. On their arrival in Puerto Cabezas before reaching Waspam, the Sisters' Spanish was so poor that they completely lacked understanding of their introduction to the mayor.⁴⁸ Another memorable moment for all the Sisters and a classic example of language difficulties occurred when Sister Borgia misspoke a simple reply to a question. In response to how she felt she answered, "I am married" instead of the "I am tired," and received a response from a Capuchin "of course, very married to the Lord."⁴⁹ Fortunately, while in Managua, Madre Francesca, who housed the missionaries at the Colegio de la Asuncion, helped out. Each missionary received her own Spanish tutor while with the Asuncion Sisters.⁵⁰ Madre Francesca took the sisters into her home for three months and taught them Nicaraguan customs and how to adjust to living in the tropical environment they would face in Waspam. Staying with the Madre helped relieve initial tension and anxiety before the hard work began. They also began to experience the gulf between the ruling elite of the country and the poverty and destitution of ordinary people. Growing accustomed to poverty, a warm and humid climate, strange cultural traditions, new rules for behavior, and the novelty of Nicaraguan social classes were all considerable tasks for the Sisters. In exchange, the sisters taught English to high school girls.

Learning the Spanish language was evidently very difficult for the Sisters, but language acquisition at first seemed less compelling than other problems, although it turned out to be one of the biggest issues in improving the relationship with the Miskito people. Language helped in the transitional change from paternalism to partnership. Miskitos felt much more respected and at ease when the Sisters spoke Spanish instead of English. One may ask why, in this case, were non-Spanish speaking nuns chosen for the mission? Although none of the four missionaries knew Spanish at the time the Council chose them, they were well qualified in other ways to be missionaries in their fields and in their enthusiasm for the task. Bishop Niedhammer believed that the Sisters could learn Spanish, so he had not made it a prerequisite. More to the point, most Miskito children

⁴⁸ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder 1945-1969.

⁴⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs. NICA 1945-1977, undated.

⁵⁰ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission, September 5, 1945.

spoke only their own language, Miskito, an Indian language that few outside their own group knew, and this made teaching these children difficult, as learning the Miskito language had to be done entirely as on-the-job training. Even after spending a few months in Nicaragua, language remained an obstacle.

In the beginning, as predicted, none of the Sisters spoke Spanish very well. One missionary recalled that “most of the day was spent studying Spanish, then lunch, then more Spanish, and so on.”⁵¹ To learn a language is one thing; to communicate using only that language is quite a different and more difficult task. Nevertheless, language did not become an insurmountable barrier, for it was faith in humanity, not language, which eventually bound the Agnesians and the Miskitos together. The Sisters’ language improved over time, building up respect and a sense of community between American nuns and Nicaraguan Indians.

An advantage for the Sisters was that many English-speaking Nicaraguans lived on the East Coast and especially around the city of Bluefields, so it was often possible to communicate in English.⁵² The vast majority of Nicaraguans spoke Spanish, but on the East Coast the languages of the Creole, Sumo, and Rama people were spoken, and English could be heard as commonly as Spanish. For Miskitos, learning the Agnesians’ English meant not only mastering verb endings but becoming versed in idiomatic expressions, gestures, and tone of voice. All of the missionaries were eventually able at least to communicate, though without losing their American English idioms, and they eventually became proficient in Spanish, too.

The four missionaries finally left Managua for Puerto Cabeza by plane on December 7, where they became acquainted with other missionaries and Americans. A small plane took them to Waspam two weeks later, on December 20, more than three months after they left Fond du Lac. They found the Miskito Indians in dire need of almost everything the missionaries had to offer. Their new home was built in a small Miskito village in a clearing surrounded by forest on the Rio Coco seventy miles from its mouth.⁵³ Waspam had few houses, mostly built on stilts to afford protection from insects,

⁵¹ CSA Archives, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission, September 5, 1945.

⁵² *Sandal Prints*, 6.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

snakes, and other animals, but it was a center for the Standard Fruit Company, and a road to connect the town with Puerto Cabeza, forty-nine miles away, was under construction. The Miskito of Waspam lived simple lives, were quite poor by the nuns' standards, and relied on hunting, fishing, and slash and burn swidden agriculture for their livelihoods.⁵⁴ As the Miskito people's lives required that they frequently move from camp to camp, it was difficult for the nurses to keep track of their clinic patients.

The Sisters had never seen poverty such as they found in Nicaragua, but it did not scare them away, although they admitted to being a little afraid at first.⁵⁵ An annual salary of \$600 for each of the four Sisters made them wealthy in comparison to the Indians.⁵⁶ The Miskito had no income except for a handful of cordobas they received in return for rice and beans sold to the few traders on the Rio Coco.⁵⁷ The Miskito were so poor that the Creole elite of Eastern Nicaragua disdained and despised them, viewing the Indians as nearly sub-human.

The missionaries' fight against poverty, lack of confidence, dependency, and a general feeling of hopelessness began with improving the Miskito people's health. But before health care or education commenced, the Sisters conducted a religious ceremony on their first night in Waspam, translated from Latin to Spanish by a Capuchin priest so some of the Indians could understand. The Sisters thought that this ceremony brought the Indians together with them as human beings in a spiritual manner. Soon, every Friday, night the Sisters taught religion, using what little Spanish they knew to study the Bible in hopes that the Miskitos would understand why the missionaries cared so much about them.

The mission statute, or guidelines, that Bishop Niedhammer had set out had let the Agnesians know the problems of Miskito society, viewed through the Bishop's perception of the Indians' lack of faith. Fear of taking on new tasks, dependence upon others, yearning for love, lack of confidence, and aggressive behavior were all problems that the Bishop expected the missionaries to rectify.⁵⁸ The missionaries' chosen means to

⁵⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Work Folder, Letter from Sr Mary Agnes.

⁵⁵ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs.

⁵⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Sister Francis Borgia Correspondence, File 1, April 27, 1944.

⁵⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission, 6.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

accomplish this was through prayer, education, and health care. Even to the very poor who could not afford any health care, the nuns gave charity, because it was their view that they could not let God's children suffer or die so easily.⁵⁹ As soon as the Sisters arrived, they recognized that they needed to establish a bridge of trust to the Miskito. Education and health care alone would not accomplish this, the four women decided; they needed to be with people outside of these roles in order to relate to the Indians. Singing with them at mass or simply going to their weddings might accomplish more.⁶⁰

Bishop Niedhammer's mission statutes had included various information for the Congregation.⁶¹ The first and most important point stated that the Bishop and Capuchins entrusted the missionary work to the Congregation rather than to Capuchins running the clinic or school. This meant that the mission's direction was up to them, on the condition that it would be "on Christian principles for the Glory of God." The basic rules that applied to Sisters of the order in the United States were applied to the Nicaraguan mission in terms of everyday living. Canon law needed to be followed, but the Superior General of the Congregation retained power over the missionaries to maintain order and unity. Also included was the stipulation that missionaries would have to keep the Superior General informed of the progress, and that she might visit biennially. Lastly, Bishop Niedhammer stressed that missionaries needed to be well trained in the field in which they were to perform, such as health care or education. His thoughts were that there would be plenty of problems in Nicaragua, and he wanted experts in the field to concentrate on difficulties in the mission rather than worrying whether or not they were carrying out their jobs correctly.

Duties of the Regional Superior in Waspam, established by Superior General Mother Angeline Kamp, allowed better communication between the Motherhouse and the mission, due to the time constraints and distance.⁶² These duties fell into the hands of Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff, who accepted the position from Mother Angeline on January 17, 1945. Authorization of travel within the mission field was entrusted to the Regional

⁵⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Statutes Folder.

⁶⁰ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969.

⁶¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Statutes Folder.

⁶² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Statutes Folder, Duties of Regional Superior.

Superior, for safety reasons. In the beginning, the Sisters were naïve about the intentions of the local people and a bit frightened of them, so they traveled as little as possible. Financial stability was assured by limiting authorization for purchases to the Regional Superior. Arrangement for safekeeping of the vows and religious life through spiritual direction was accomplished in the same way that this was accomplished in the States. Annual visitations permitted a check on problems and progress of the mission.

The manner of dress was something that gave the Sisters no little difficulty once they arrived in Bluefields, where a tropical climate gave a new perspective to the matter of clothing.⁶³ The Sisters were to wear the complete habit while in the chapel, oratory, or at prayer. However, the habit could be white. Similar to the black habit, it was pleated and attached to a yoke. Aprons could also be worn for work and school to keep laundry to a minimum.

In March 1962, seventeen years after first setting foot in Nicaragua, the missionaries officially changed their own dress code.⁶⁴ The Sisters started to wear an open neck cap with sandals and white stockings while in the house. This change made Bishop Niedhammer very angry, to say the least, because the Sisters had not asked him for permission, as stated in an earlier agreement, thus undermining his authority. He refused to speak to those who wore the new style. Although Niedhammer gave them freedom over the clinic and school, in his view religious matters, including dress, remained under episcopal authority. The Sisters experimented with varieties of habits to accommodate to the climate and culture.⁶⁵ Material for the habits came from the Motherhouse to avoid wasting time looking for suitable material in Nicaragua. Measurements for their habits had been taken before leaving Fond du Lac. The hem of the habit had to be three inches wide, and the habit needed to be four inches from the floor. Although this may seem conservative by current standards, for a nun living in 1962 it was a nice change.

To imagine a better picture of the climate change and necessity for alteration in the dress, just a little clarification is in order. Nicaragua's climate is sub-tropical, it is

⁶³ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Mission Statutes Folder.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, March 1962.

⁶⁵ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, Letter of August 8, 1957.

never cold in the lowlands. When the second group of Sisters came in 1947, it was 10 below zero in the Wisconsin winter.⁶⁶ Winter weather in lowland Nicaragua seldom falls below 80 degrees. In addition to the heat, a change in the style of dress was deemed necessary due to dampness. In Nicaragua, nine months of the year, April to November, are “rainy.”⁶⁷ It was not that the nuns determined the style of dress for themselves; it was the heat that determined it for them! The heat also produced problems in preserving food, for there were no freezers or refrigerators such as the Sisters were accustomed to use in the United States.⁶⁸

In addition to climate, culture shock was also quite an experience for the neophyte missionaries. Poverty, tropical diseases and other health problems were fairly new to them. What might seem grotesque to Americans might be perfectly normal in Waspam. One sister observed a native mother picking lice from her child's hair and eating them.⁶⁹ Local water was not potable, so the Sisters collected rainwater for drinking.⁷⁰ Sister Mary Agnes repeatedly told the Miskito people to boil their water, or disease could incapacitate them. Unfortunately, they did not always listen. The nearby creek was used for bathing, as a toilet, and it was also the primary source of the Miskitos' drinking water.⁷¹

Water-borne disease was not the only health problem the missionaries faced, for other disease vectors were rampant. Common illnesses included intestinal parasites, tuberculosis, malnutrition, smallpox, and typhoid. The first three diseases continued to trouble the mission well beyond the first five years of the mission, but smallpox and typhoid were defeated after a few years of vaccinations.⁷²

Obtaining medicine was one of the biggest problems the Sisters faced in battling disease. Even if the Fond du Lac Motherhouse shipped supplies to Bluefields, it could be weeks before the Sisters received the packages. The solution to shortages was to concentrate on prevention rather than just treating every patient.⁷³ Gradually, the Sisters

⁶⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter to Sister M. Agnes, September 29, 1959.

⁶⁷ CSA Archives Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder 1945-1969, January 17, 1945.

⁶⁸ CSA Archives Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder 1945-1969.

⁶⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters to Sister M. Agnes, Letter 26.

⁷⁰ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters from Sister M. Agnes, Letter 15-4.

⁷¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters from Sister M. Agnes, Letter 15-3.

⁷² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, June 1968 Chronicle.

⁷³ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters to Sister M. Agnes, undated.

were able to obtain more medicine, bandages, and needles. Those supplies most in demand included insect repellent, syringes and needles, medicated powder, adhesive plaster, gauze, and lubricating jelly, but the greatest need was bandages.⁷⁴ Rationing these items was necessary, as they were always in short supply and shipments of them were often delayed.

At first, any medicine was an improvement for the clinic and a gift, considering the meager supplies with which Sister Mary Agnes had begun her work. She had been initially armed against disease and accidents with just two bottles of aspirin and two bottles of quinine!⁷⁵ In a conscious decision that helped the Nicaraguan economy as well as the patients, the missionaries decided to purchase as much medicine as they could in Nicaragua. Except for items purchased in Wisconsin and shipped from the Motherhouse, everything was bought in Nicaragua in order to support local pharmaceutical houses. Twenty years after their arrival, the nuns still bought medicine exclusively from the Catholic Mission Medical Board (CMMB), with the exception of small amounts sent by the Motherhouse in Fond du Lac. There was also a political aspect to the decision, for the operations of the CMMB seem to have had a positive affect on the attitude and tolerance of Nicaraguan officials toward the foreign Catholic missions.⁷⁶

The Sisters always asserted that the physical needs of the Miskito people were always their first priority, but the health of the nuns themselves was a constant concern.⁷⁷ A replacement for anyone who fell ill was not an option, and the work of the mission had to go on.⁷⁸ Still, conditions told on the missionaries' health, and later in the mission some Sisters had to return to the States on account of a need for treatment.⁷⁹ Nevertheless, the first four missionaries enjoyed remarkable longevity in their work. Sister Pauletta Scheck served in Nicaragua from 1945 until 1949, when she returned to the United States due to illness. Sister Agnes Rita Fisette worked there until 1953, when she accompanied five Nicaraguan women who were prospective recruits to the order to

⁷⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters to Sister M. Agnes, February 20, 1946.

⁷⁵ CSA Archives,, Foreign Mission File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs, 46.

⁷⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, 1966-67 Chronicle.

⁷⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters from Sister Mary Agnes.

⁷⁸ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, October 22, 1957.

⁷⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters from Sister Mary Agnes.

the formation program in Fond du Lac. She did not return to the mission. Sister Francis Borgia Dreiling remained until 1953 during her first stint in Nicaragua, and she returned to Puerto Cabezas, an offshoot of the original mission, in 1958 and stayed in Nicaragua until 1964 or 1965. She traveled once more to Nicaragua, this time to Managua, where she lived from 1975 to 1977. Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff, the nurse and leader for the mission, served until June 1961, when severe illness forced her return to the United States. She died of cancer in December of that year.

Bishop Niedhammer originally had wanted six women for the mission, two registered nurses and four teachers.⁸⁰ Constantly urging the Congregation for two more women, the Bishop received his wish when Sister Tarcisia Ullrich and Sister Constantia Esterbrook, both teachers, arrived in Waspam on March 7, 1947. Sister Tarcisia was assigned as Principal of the school, and Sister Constantia originally taught first grade and gave sewing lessons to older girls.

Within a few months after the Sisters established their clinic and school, Waspam changed from a village that consisted of a handful of families into a more vigorous community, as Indians from surrounding pueblos were attracted by the new facilities and medical care. The attraction of what the Sisters had to offer was undeniable. Costs on average for the improvement in Miskito health were \$2.00 per patient, a vast sum in 1945 unattainable by the poor Miskito peoples.⁸¹

The Sisters saw improved health care as a means to help the Miskito realize their own dignity and potential as human beings and as Christians. The Indians responded; daily medical care saw new faces as well as old ones, often accompanied by smiles (sometimes toothless) from the thankful patients. There was a large influx of patients as soon as the Sisters arrived in Waspam, but the women were still seeing a steady flow of new patients five years after their arrival in Nicaragua. Twenty-three years later, by 1968, the Sisters involved in the Nicaraguan mission were seeing fifty patients daily at the clinic, not including house calls.⁸² By this time, the Agnesians had built an extensive series of ties with the Miskito. Care was given to human beings, not “natives.” Health

⁸⁰ CSA Archives, Bishop Niedhammer Folder, transcript of interview with Niedhammer.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letters from Sister Mary Agnes, 1968-69 Report.

improvements had made great strides, but the health problems in Nicaragua were still enormous by American standards.

Once their initial work in the health issue had produced improvements, education became the next item on the Sisters' agenda. Health care came first because only through stabilizing health conditions could Miskito children attend school regularly.⁸³ Health problems continued to affect education. A classic example of an interruption of schoolwork due to health problems came in July 1968 when a polio epidemic caused suspension of classes.⁸⁴

In a December 22, 1947 letter to Mother Angeline, Gaston Litton, Director of the American Library in Managua, a non-Catholic, summarized the progress of the school in its first two years. His praise, incorporating a very condescending view towards the Indians, came from a memory of when "In the afternoon we visited the classrooms which were so attractive and neat that the most fastidious would be pleased. It was easy to see how, in two short school terms, these little Indian children had crossed the threshold from ignorance, indifference, and nakedness to interested young model Christians."⁸⁵

Educational success did not occur overnight, or even in the first few months of the mission. Concerns over the health of the children kept education to a bare minimum until months after the nuns' arrival in Nicaragua. Once school opened, on May 19, 1946, the first classes were held in the laundry room of the convent until the initial two-room school building was completed.⁸⁶ Attendance was irregular in the beginning, because few Indians, children or adults, understood the benefits an education would provide for their futures. At first, roughly 160-170 children attended the school, though not all attended at the same time. Little boys often came to school in their customary dress, that is to say without any clothing at all, and it took some efforts by the missionaries to arrange clothing for them and to prevent them from giving it away. Language remained a problem, for half of the students spoke only Miskito. Fortunately Sister Borgia had a very bright trilingual girl in her class who could translate English into Spanish and Miskito while she taught Miskito to her teacher. The Sisters opposed separating students who

⁸³ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, undated.

⁸⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969.

⁸⁵ Naber, 261.

spoke only Miskito from others on the grounds that it fostered class distinctions, a feature of Nicaraguans society that they found very discomfiting.

All the students began at a first grade level since none had ever gone to school before or had known about pencils or books; most Miskito were illiterate.⁸⁷ Although the students began at a first grade level, they were divided into groups by age. Seniorita Lillian Cruz, a local volunteer, taught the oldest students. Sister Francis Borgia taught the intermediate students, while Sister Pauletta had the pleasure of working with the youngest.⁸⁸ One method that the teachers later used successfully was to teach some lessons in English. One rationale for this practice was the hopes that some children might receive an advanced education in the United States.⁸⁹ The Sisters also began to recruit girls to join the Convent of St. Agnes.⁹⁰

Over time, education began to mature into the successful operation that Gaston Litton described. It took a few years before the Indians were “Christianized” and “educated.” In July 1950, 190 children regularly attended school, and only two Sisters taught.⁹¹ According to the 1968-69 report from the Regional Superior, the school enrollment was 240 students, with four nuns and three lay teachers providing instruction. The report also announced the acquisition of rented texts.⁹² Addition of workbooks and blackboards earlier gave the Miskito children an opportunity few poor Nicaraguans had. Capuchin Brothers completed a brand new school in the 1960s, when over 300 students were enrolled.⁹³ The new concrete structure included a large auditorium for plays and social events.

The mission began to bear fruit in other ways. In 1948, the first Nicaraguan women made application to join the Congregation of St. Agnes, including Sister Teresita

⁸⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs, NICA 1945-1977.

⁸⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, 9.

⁸⁸ Naber, 260.

⁸⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Dreiling Historical Memoirs, NICA 1945-1977. 75.

⁹⁰ Naber, 261.

⁹¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder 1945-1969.

⁹² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, 1968-69 Report.

⁹³ *Sandal Prints*, 34.

Inés Argüello from Bluefields, the largest town on the East Coast. During 1948-1955, twenty young Nicaraguans joined the Agnesians and traveled to Fond du Lac.⁹⁴

The Sisters at Waspam faced adversity in many ways during those early years of the mission. Doing their own laundry by hand, ironing, cleaning, and cooking took time away from medicine and education, but time was always made for prayer. Within a year, the kerosene lamps used to light the mission were replaced by electric lights. On the first Christmas in 1946, Capuchin Brother Gaul Neumann surprised the Sisters by installing an electric light and two Christmas trees in the house.⁹⁵ Brother Gaul became the Bluefields “handyman” and was dubbed “Fixum” by the Agnesians for all the planning, building, and fixing he did for them. He spent twenty years as the builder and constructor in Bluefields, credited as builder of the Waspam school building.⁹⁶

Although the Sisters did the teaching and health care at the mission, Capuchins were available to support their work. They erected buildings, and Father Herman Buss from Detroit was the pastor in Waspam and held the services at the mission.⁹⁷ Twenty Capuchins from the United States cared for the people of Bluefields in 1951. This mission took a lot of work, and without the support of the Capuchins the Waspam mission might not have succeeded. Occasionally there were disagreements and disputes, and there was often frustration and homesickness, but the mission continued to function.

Other hardships ensued throughout the first few years of the mission. Some Sisters mentioned that the most difficult of all the tasks for both Capuchins and Agnesians lay in obtaining respect and love of the natives.⁹⁸ This may seem a surprising assessment, considering the eventual success of the mission, but that was how the Sisters felt at first. There were other more tangible difficulties. The Sisters had a good deal of difficulty adapting to the local food. Upon arrival in Waspam, Brother Gaul surprised the weary Sisters with a table set with a “real American dinner.”⁹⁹ Difficulties ensued in switching completely from American to Miskito food. The nature of the ingredients, lack

⁹⁴ Information provided by Sister Margaret Lorimer, CSA.

⁹⁵ Naber, 260.

⁹⁶ *Sandal Prints*, 42. Naber, 260, construes the nickname as “Brother Fix-em.”

⁹⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission.

⁹⁸ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Pamphlet, Divina Pastora Society, May 1949, 12.

⁹⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission, 4.

of seasoning, and method of cooking all seemed unappealing to the nuns. Mealtime for Miskitos consisted mostly of a diet of rice, beans, and occasionally bananas, three times a day, and this could become boring rapidly.¹⁰⁰ The rice and beans, and occasionally tortillas, were cooked in huge kettles. The Sisters ate many foods they did not enjoy, and new tastes in spices and textures took time to acquire, but nutritional requirements remained a concern in an areas where the basic foods were beans and rice. To remedy these problems, some Sisters opted to buy more expensive “American” food in the city or have it shipped from the United States, at least until they became accustomed to the local diet.¹⁰¹ After settling into the mission, the nuns made their own pudding, bread, and even homemade cookies.¹⁰² Native citrus fruits, coconuts, cassava, bananas, plantains, and pineapples continued to play partner to apples and peanuts sent from home.¹⁰³

Food ordered from the States took time to arrive due to slow mail service from Fond du Lac to Waspam. After nearly a year, the women were no longer surprised that it took so long to ship supplies or food. Sister Francesca de Jesus from Fond du Lac managed occasionally to send the missionaries yeast and butter.¹⁰⁴ It was not uncommon for mail to become lost, but with luck it was not the yeast or butter. Communication, both to pay bills and for spiritual support, was very important for the missionaries and for the Superior General, who helped locate lost care packages full of goodies from the U.S.

Animals of the tropics were one enduring source of anxiety for the missionaries. One memorable story of the mission was when the Sisters joined together to kill a black snake with a machete, rake, and shovel. The snake went under the stairs of the house, and the nuns tore up the place looking for it. Sister Borgia was conspicuously “a mile” away.¹⁰⁵ Snakes remained a constant problem and threat to the mission. On another occasion, a boa constrictor slithered away, untouched, because Sister Mary Agnes feared that if she attacked the snake it might kill someone.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁰ *Sandal Prints*, 41.

¹⁰¹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969.

¹⁰² CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Foilder, 1945-1969, Letter 26.

¹⁰³ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter from Sister Francesca de Jesus to Sister Mary Agnes Dickoff,, April 23, 1946.

¹⁰⁴ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter from Sister Francesca de Jesus, February 10, 1946.

¹⁰⁵ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Waspam Folder, 1945-1969, Letter 26.

¹⁰⁶ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Letter from Sister Mary Agnes, undated.

Bishop Niedhammer and his successors were so impressed with the wonderful work of the Sisters that they requested more Agnesians for two other areas of mission work.¹⁰⁷ At the request of Bishop Niedhammer, Mother Angeline Kamp accepted Colegio Nino Jesus school in Puerto Cabezas as a second Agnesian mission in Nicaragua in 1950.¹⁰⁸ In 1960, the Christian Brothers, another group of American missionaries located at the Instituto Pedagogico in Managua, pleaded for Sisters of Saint Agnes to teach the primary grades in the Instituto. The Instituto is one of the finest schools in Nicaragua, and although the Congregation was hesitant to accept, due to concerns about their resources being stretched too far, all those involved ultimately deemed it a wise move.¹⁰⁹ Rewards have outweighed the hardships, and today there are still Sisters in Nicaragua treating and educating the Miskito people and other Nicaraguans, having survived even the trials, violence and divisions of the Sandinista period.

Why was the early mission successful? One reason this mission has continued for more than half a century is that the Sisters and Catholic Church stopped trying to assimilate and change the Miskito. Instead, they have taken a stance that the Miskito are not “heathens” and “natives,” but people to be made healthy and educated, while allowing their “native” culture to remain intact. God's call to fight this battle was answered by the Capuchins and the Congregation of St. Agnes, but the war has become a different one from that they originally envisioned.

Capuchin priests and Agnesian nuns worked together to make the mission successful, and the mission changed the missionaries in some ways. As American nuns became more involved in Latin America, political perceptions have changed. Politics and diplomacy seemed insignificant in comparison to improvements in health and education of the people, although this concept would be challenged during the Sandinista period in ways that deeply divided the Agnesians' own views of the purpose of their mission.

Americans in the 1940s often thought of missions in terms of wild animals, strange foods, kerosene light and a host of people who hungered for the missionary to bring them the word of God and “civilize” them. Not surprisingly, the missionary

¹⁰⁷ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Requests for Mission Service Folder, January 7, 1972.

¹⁰⁸ Naber, 261.

¹⁰⁹ CSA Archives, Foreign Mission File, Historical Accounts of Nicaraguan Mission, 12.

Agnesians began their efforts with a paternalistic attitude towards the Miskito people. This was not hard for them to do so, surrounded by hunger, perceived injustice, and misery. The empowerment of the Miskito people came to be a goal of the mission instead of their cultural transformation. By suffering hardships with the Miskito Indians and learning to see them as people, the Agnesians gradually changed and learned that they were partners in Christ with the Miskito rather than teachers of Christ.

Colwert Pier in 1858

The Making of a Civil War Soldier:

Colwert K. Pier of Fond du Lac

Rick Hamacher

The Civil War in popular memory conjures up images of famous battles, great speeches, and a country that was torn apart for four years. To the people who lived through the Civil War, it had a much greater immediacy. For soldiers, it might be the experience of camping on cold lonely nights, filled with thoughts of when, or whether, one might go home. For civilians, it could be horror that lay in the unexpected message, bearing news of a family tragedy. For one man from Fond du Lac, Colwert K. Pier, the war began as a youthful adventure and an opportunity to establish a political career. But Pier's Civil War experience also became an occasion to prove his courage and leadership ability.¹

Colwert K. Pier's Civil War experience was unusual among soldiers who fought in that conflict in several respects. He first served as a private in the ranks, but he later rejoined the conflict, as a colonel who commanded regiments from two different states. Locally, following the fall of Fort Sumter in April 1861, he gained the distinction of being the first person from Fond du Lac to enlist in President Lincoln's new volunteer army.² Pier's wartime service also was not continuous. After an initial enlistment of three months, he returned home to Fond du Lac. As the years of war dragged on, Pier's brief and largely uneventful service must have seemed increasingly trivial, and he evidently decided it would be very beneficial to his budding political aspirations if he were to return to the army. He organized a militia unit and eventually received an appointment as a lieutenant colonel in the Union Army. Thus, the ex-private rejoined the military as a regimental commander for the last year of the war.

Colwert K. Pier made history as soon as he was born on June 7, 1841, for he and his twin sister Carrie were the first children born to settlers of European origin in Fond du

¹ There appear to have been two different spellings of the name "Colwert." While the published letters Pier wrote in 1861 used the spelling "Colwort," the family, according to Colwert Pier's great grandson, spelled the name "Colwert," and the latter is the spelling used in this essay.

² Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier*, (Fond du Lac: Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1991), 49.

Lac. As a child growing up on his parents' forty-one-acre farm, Colwert Pier learned the value of hard work, a lesson that paid off later in life. He was expected to help around the farm when school was not in session, planting crops in the spring and harvesting them in the fall. In the winter months, young Pier could be found in the district school, where he was an excellent student who always wanted to find out more. He excelled in mathematics, composition, and elocution. Pier attended the district school, where he became interested in public speaking and participated in the debating club and the "speaking schools." These extracurricular activities were turned into good use in Pier's later years, for he prospered as a local attorney after the Civil War.³

As a teenager, Pier became interested in entrepreneurship, and he sought ways to make money to pay for his studies. It was customary in early Fond du Lac for young children to make use of anything and everything they could sell to make money. When the county fair rolled around every year, or the circus came to town, Colwert Pier could be found on the streets of Fond du Lac selling candy, popcorn, and anything he thought people would be interested in buying.⁴

Following graduation from the district school in 1857 at the age of sixteen, Pier was ready to move into a larger world. He left home for the first time and traveled to Galesburg, Illinois, where he studied at Lombard College.⁵ This was certainly an eye-opening experience for a young adult from rural Wisconsin. There appears to be no extant record of his studies, but one may surmise that Pier fit in well at school, and he certainly became interested in the field of law while enrolled there. During his summer vacations, Pier returned to Fond du Lac where he interned in the office of Judge Robert Flint.⁶

³ *History of Fond du Lac County 1880* (Chicago: Western Historical Company, 1880), 845.

⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵ Chartered as a university, Lombard College was founded as Illinois Liberal Institute in 1851, sponsored by the Universalist Church. The name was changed to Lombard in 1855 in response to a gift of \$20,000 by Benjamin Lombard, a prominent Universalist, for the purpose of replacing the school's building, which had been destroyed by fire. The school closed in 1930, and its records were transferred to nearby Knox College. www.thezephyr.com (Galesburg, Illinois).

⁶ Robert Flint was elected county judge in 1860, before his election Flint had worked as a lawyer in Fond du Lac, earning a good reputation as a counselor and pleader.

Pier was at home and working for Judge Flint when Fort Sumter fell to South Carolina troops. This dramatic event, the illegal seizure of Federal property by forces of a State government, touched off a warlike surge of enthusiasm for war against the ‘secessionists’ throughout the North, and Fond du Lac was no exception to this mood. The news of the conflict reached Fond du Lac rather quickly, for Pier first heard the news that Fort Sumter had fallen early in the evening of Saturday, April 13, 1861.⁷

His immediate reaction was to decide that he would volunteer to join the army. Patriotism apart, Pier probably also saw an opportunity to make a name for himself in the community. That Saturday evening was probably filled with little sleep and plenty of discussion between Pier and Christian Klock, his boyhood friend and neighbor. They spent the evening talking over the recent events at Fort Sumter and decided that it was in their best interest to fulfill their duty, sign up to serve in the Union army, and participate in putting down the rebellion, a resolution to the conflict that almost everyone outside the South believed would happen very quickly. The first thing on Monday morning, the two young men walked to the office of Colonel S.E. Lefferts and signed their names to the muster roll. Pier took the pen first and signed his name on the list, thus becoming the first person from Fond du Lac to offer his services to the cause of the Union. Pier and Klock were assigned to Company “I” 1st Wisconsin Volunteer Infantry Regiment, a unit that was nicknamed “the Badger Boys.”⁸

Following the fall of Fort Sumter President Abraham Lincoln had issued an appeal for 75,000 ninety-day militiamen, and Pier and Klock became part of this group.⁹ Almost everyone, including Lincoln, expected the contest would be a short war, although, General Winfield Scott, commander of the Union army at the beginning of the conflict, believed “ninety-day regiments [were] raw and useless.”¹⁰ He calculated they would need many months of training and preparation before they would be ready to see action in battle, and only just as their enlistment came to an end would they be ready to fight. This

⁷ *History of Fond du Lac County, 1880*, 788.

⁸ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1861.

⁹ James McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom: The Civil War Era* (New York: Oxford University Press, Inc, 1988), 322.

¹⁰ McPherson, 335.

was a problem that hobbled the United States Army's early efforts in the war, and it certainly was characteristic of Pier's own initial experience of war.

Colwert Pier's regiment consisted mainly of men recruited from the Fond du Lac area, as was customary at the time. Residents from a single town or city were organized into companies. Companies from nearby towns were grouped together to form a regiment, each of which received a numerical designation in the order it was formed. The standard complement of a regiment in the Union army was a thousand men, formed from ten companies.¹¹ Pier's "Badger Boys" numbered considerably fewer, however, for the entire company was composed of a total of only seventy-seven men.¹²

On Tuesday evening, April 16, 1861, Colwert K. Pier was sworn in as a member of the "Badger Boys" volunteers. At eight p.m. inside Amory Hall, located in the Amory block, the members of the 1st Wisconsin volunteers marched in and arranged themselves in double file facing the platform to take their oath of allegiance. Roll call was taken, followed by a short prayer for the safe return of the men, given by Reverend George Eastman.¹³ Following this blessing, the oath was administered to the men, after which the audience, by its own request, was also given the same oath. The ladies presented the soldiers with a basket of Union rosettes. District Attorney Edward Bragg gave the main address.¹⁴ Bragg sought to rally the young men to the cause, and the address was reported to have been "rousing." Following Bragg's speech, the regimental colors were presented to Captain McCall, commander of the regiment, who promised to protect the colors and let nothing happen to them throughout the battles to come.¹⁵

A bit more than two weeks later, on May 2, 1861, Colwert Pier, along with the rest of the "Badger Boys," headed to the Fond du Lac railroad depot. Friends, parents, wives, children, brothers, and Sisters said their good-byes to the men as they boarded the train for a short ride to Milwaukee. The men then marched to the St. Charles Hotel, where they were treated to a feast. Then it was time to get measured for uniforms,

¹¹ McPherson, 326.

¹² *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, May 4, 1861.

¹³ Reverend Eastman, an Episcopalian minister, was rector at St. Paul's parish 1854-1866.

¹⁴ Bragg was district attorney for Fond du Lac at the start of the war. He entered the army in 1862 as a captain and eventually became a general. *History of Fond du Lac County, 1880*, 788.

¹⁵ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, May 4, 1861.

following which the troops marched about a mile and a half to Camp Scott (located on what is today Wisconsin Avenue, near Wells Street and Kilbourn Avenues), the place they would call home for the next several weeks.¹⁶

Camp life was routine for the volunteers. Every morning at five the men received a wake up call and formed into ranks to answer roll call. They then returned to their tents, where they shook out and folded the bedding, swept the camp street, which was known as McCall Street, clean of debris, and washed up. At eight they formed into ranks once more and marched to breakfast. Drilling commenced at ten and continued for three hours. At two, the men reassembled for dinner. At three p.m., there was a parade of regiments. At five or six the men were free to do what they wished, except for individuals assigned to stand guard duty. At eight the men again formed into ranks and marched to supper. At ten, the camp lights were doused, and the men settled down for the night. However, they were to remain at the ready throughout the night, since they could be called out at any time, on three minutes' notice.¹⁷ When the men were not on duty, they took part in a wide range of activities to keep them busy. Some wrote letters home to loved ones or, in Pier's case, to the *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*. Pier had evidently made an agreement with the local newspaper to write a series of accounts detailing the "Badger Boys" experiences.¹⁸ Pier likely had personal motives in undertaking this assignment, as he thereby had an opportunity to distinguish himself in Fond du Lac in a way that its citizens would remember what he had done after the war concluded. He signed all the letters with the transparent pseudonym "Trowloc," except for the final letter, which he signed "Colwort." According to Pier, other men in camp could be found during their free time "reading, running, singing, dancing, talking, laughing almost constantly." Pier wrote, "we are provided with music from the violin, banjo, and guitar. We are generally in good spirits and heartily join in the chorus oh!

¹⁶ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter I (C. Pier to *Reporter*), May 11, 1861.

¹⁷ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter I, May 11, 1861.

¹⁸ Fifteen letters appeared in the newspaper, and a sixteenth may have been written. The "missing" letter, however, is number thirteen, and that number may have been skipped for superstitious reasons. As letter XIV is dated only five days after XII, this explanation seems plausible.

ain't you glad you joined the Badgers.”¹⁹ From this account, it appears that Pier and his fellow soldiers enjoyed their time together at Camp Scott.

Notwithstanding this description, the new recruits had some grounds for complaint. The uniforms the men were given were not made from the best materials, according to Pier. He thought they were quickly thrown together with whatever cloth could be found. The uniforms were neither matching in style, nor did they fit. During the early part of the war, commanders often looked to their state to provide the uniforms necessary to outfit the men. This, together with personal idiosyncrasies, produced a great diversity in garb among Northern troops. Nearly every color and shade was represented, and the color of choice for the uniforms of many Union companies, including Pier's, was gray. This ultimately led to near-disaster in early battles, as the Northern armies often misidentified troops wearing variously colored uniforms, mistaking friend for foe and vice versa. Pier wrote of his uniform, “the cloth is gray of various shades. Most of it is a poor quality and will not stand hard service. The pants have a black cord down the sides; the coats have brass buttons and standing collars. We have small gray caps of Zouave pattern.”²⁰ Pier's company appears to have been the victim of an example of war profiteering. The poor quality of the uniforms could be blamed on the textile factories. They had obtained massive contracts from the Federal Government to provide uniforms for the new volunteer army. In order to fulfill these contracts for hundreds of thousands of uniforms at maximum profit, textile manufactures compressed fibers of recycled woolen goods into a material called “shoddy.” The practice was so common that this technical term entered the English language as a standard word to describe poor workmanship. “The blankets disintegrated, the uniforms did not stand the test of battle, and shoes fell apart on the men, leaving them shoeless and forced to march great distances barefoot.”²¹

¹⁹ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter I, May 11, 1861.

²⁰ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter II, May 16, 1861. Zouaves were French light infantry, originally recruited from France's North African colonies. Gaining fame during the Crimean War, Zouaves exercised a fascination for many Americans at this time, and military uniforms were frequently modeled on their exotic styling.

²¹ McPherson, 324.

To supply the troops, the army employed the Quartermaster Bureau, whose job was to provide the men with everything except weapons and food. This organization provided “uniforms, overcoats, shoes, knapsacks, haversacks, canteens, mess gear, blankets, tents, camp equipage, barracks, horses, mules, forage, harnesses, horseshoes, and portable blacksmith shops, [and] supply wagons.” It took a lot of equipment and haulage to supply a Union army in the field. When in battle, a Union army of 100,000 men required 2,500 supply wagons and at least 35,000 animals to carry supplies. The weight of all this equipment took a toll on the individual soldiers, too.²² Pier wrote of an experience in Maryland, “I do not think it was the walk that used us up, (the distance there and back being only about 16 miles,) so much as the heavy load we had to carry, each having a haversack filled with provisions, canteens of water, cartridge box containing 40 rounds, knapsacks weighing from 10 to 80 pounds and a 9 pound musket.”²³

Pier’s unit was well fed at Camp Scott, according to his account. The soldiers took turns waiting on tables at meals. Usually six soldiers from each company acted as waiters. Four hundred pounds of meat were cooked for dinner, but the meat was not spread equally through the companies. By the time the last companies took their turn to eat, there was no meat left. These men were forced to eat boiled potatoes, bread, and drink cold water. Otherwise, they went hungry. Soldiers were provided with spoon, knife, and fork, utensils for which they were individually responsible.²⁴

Once the men headed east, the rations changed, and the men were not so lucky. After they reached their destination in Maryland, rations consisted of “sea biscuit, meat, beans, and rice,” although Pier noted that “thanks to the kindness of Company I, 4th Connecticut, we have been supplied with potatoes, which were really a luxury and relished well.”²⁵ The once-despised potato had by that time become more appealing.

The most important piece of equipment the men were issued was their primary weapon. Pier’s company was outfitted with cumbersome muzzle-loading rifled muskets. Not all companies had the old muzzle-loading rifled muskets, as one of Pier’s

²² McPherson, 325.

²³ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter IX, June 29, 1861.

²⁴ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter II, May 16, 1861.

neighboring companies, from Connecticut, was outfitted with the Sharp's rifle. The Sharp's was a simple, yet very reliable weapon, which could inflict serious injury on the enemy:

A lever which also acted as a trigger guard was pulled down, which also lowered a block at the breech, exposing the open barrel. The soldier simply inserted a linen-wrapped cartridge into the barrel, and the act of raising the lever and block once more clipped off the back of the lined, exposing the powder. A cap placed on the nipple readied it for firing.²⁶

It was amazing that so many inexperienced men handling unfamiliar and often clumsy weapons did not cause many serious injuries, although there were cases of men shooting themselves or others in their companies. Pier mentions in one of his letters how a Connecticut soldier discharged his Sharp's rifle, and the ball shattered his leg below the knee. On another occasion, a rifle ball passed through one of the company's tents. Therefore, the colonel of Pier's regiment made special orders pertaining to their weapons, namely, forbidding them to be loaded in camp.²⁷ Battle would bring even more trials for these novice soldiers. After a fight, Pier wrote of how one soldier bragged that he had loaded his musket six times and fired, each time killing the targeted man. He told this story to every one he met until, on going up to his captain and relating the tale to him, he was told by that officer to put his ram rod down the barrel of the musket to see whether his gun was loaded. He found the rod would not go to the bottom by nearly a foot. A ball screw was obtained, and six cartridges were drawn from the musket. Pier summed up the raucous conclusion of the crestfallen braggart's commander: "The young man cracked six caps." This embarrassed soldier was also a fortunate one, for the repeatedly loaded and misfired gun had not exploded in his face.²⁸

From what can be determined from Pier's letters to the newspaper, discipline in the 1st Wisconsin seems not to have been the major problem that it was in other units of the Union Army. Pier's company, however, had its share of problems. In one letter, Pier wrote about two men from Company H who took two horses from a Virginia pasture. The culprits were criticized, as their act of theft reflected badly on the rest of the

²⁵ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter X, July 6, 1861.

²⁶ William Davis, *The Fighting Men of the Civil War*, (London: Salamander Books Limited, 1990), 62.

²⁷ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter IX, June 29, 1861.

company. The colonel ordered the horses returned. This story, with its moral of concern for the private property of people who were presumably supporters of the Confederacy, suggests the naiveté of this early period of the war, for there soon would be frequent “requisitioning” of enemy civilian property by both sides. Pier also wrote about events that took place when his company was stationed across the Potomac River from a Confederate force. Pier’s friend Christian Klock and another “Badger Boy,” Charles Kimball, waded into the river and shook hands with Confederate soldiers in the middle. The two sides exchanged greetings and made promises to be friends following the war.²⁹ This fraternization would have been cause for serious disciplinary action if any officers had witnessed it.

Discipline within volunteer units could be a serious problem, partly because these regiments selected their captains, and the newly elected captains often were afraid of upsetting subordinates who had elected them and who would return to the same community after the war ended. In the early part of the war, the captain’s duties were limited to assembling the men on ceremonial occasions and leading them in parades. Most of these men had relatively little if any military experience before the war.³⁰

By May, Colwert Pier and his company were becoming restless and could not wait for the opportunity to move out and take part in the action. The news the company had been waiting for finally arrived on May 29. As Company “I” was marching in battalion drill in the afternoon, a young boy stepped up and handed a sealed envelope to Colonel Starkweather. The Colonel

opened, read and swinging his cap he shouted ‘Boys we won’t be here 48 hours’ simultaneously our boys pulled off their caps and ‘hurrah! hurrah! hurrah!’ rung wildly out from one end of the regiment to the other – when he drew us in line of battle, read to us the telegram, which was to hold the 1st regiment ready to march in two hours.³¹

Yet even after receipt of the telegram, the “Badger Boys” faced a considerable wait. Pier’s regiment stayed in camp as the second and third regiments headed east, and a

²⁸ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XII, July 20, 1861.

²⁹ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XV, August 1, 1861.

³⁰ Bell Wiley, *The Life of Billy Yank: The Common Soldier of the Union*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1952), 128.

³¹ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter IV, June 1, 1861.

rumor began to spread throughout the camp that their regiment would be disbanded in two days, unless the men agreed to extend their enlistments for three more years. Pier figured the regiment would be disbanded, as they would never get enough men to reenlist. Pier was one of these men and stated in his letters to the *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter* that many of the men were not satisfied with their present officers. The rumor, however, turned out to be unfounded, for the regiment stayed intact during the remainder of Pier's ninety-day enlistment period.³² Pier's letters include a description of one episode that surely spread resentment of an officer through the ranks. He describes an incident when the company was drilling in pouring rain, during which the Colonel

gave orders to march for the tents, and the 'double quick at will,' into which the boys fell rapidly in the rear, and the Colonel to set back in his saddle and with much merriment exclaim 'what gallant soldiers.' All the difference there was, the Col. had a dry suit to put on, while we did not.³³

Perhaps Pier remembered episodes like this when he himself became an officer. In any event, one noteworthy event that occurred at this time was that Colwert Pier received his first monthly pay as a soldier, the sum of \$10.26.³⁴

On Sunday, June 9, the orders finally came for the 1st Wisconsin "Badger Boys" to head east and join the campaign then being organized along the Potomac. That Sunday, after receiving the news, the men quickly struck camp and marched to the depot, where again they said their good-byes to all the friends who came to see them off. Each man carried a knapsack filled with clothes, a haversack containing rations to last for three days, a canteen full of water, and his weapon. From Milwaukee the troops headed south, stopping in Kenosha for a meeting with the local citizens. From Pier's description, it must have seemed to the troops that the war was already won. On arrival the company marched to a city park where the citizens of Kenosha treated them to a terrific dinner, and paid attention to every little word the men had to say. The civilians were full of questions about what it was like to be a soldier and what they expected to find in the east. Such dinners were an effort by the army to stimulate a sense of patriotism among the citizenry

³² *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter V, June 8, 1861.

³³ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter X, July 6, 1861.

³⁴ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter V, June 8, 1861.

and to drum up support for the war effort. After the meal, the company marched back to the depot and boarded the train once more, this time heading south to Chicago. After changing trains in Chicago, the soldiers headed through the countryside of Illinois, Indiana, and Michigan, arriving in Toledo, Ohio on Monday, June 10. Once more, the men changed cars and continued their journey to Columbus, Ohio. There they once again marched through the streets of Columbus to cheering crowds. The parade through the streets of Columbus was, of course, another attempt to stimulate recruitment. Then it was back on the train for another journey, this time to Pittsburgh. In Pittsburgh, the troops changed trains before departing for Harrisburg and Chambersburg, Pennsylvania, where they arrived early Wednesday morning. All along the route, the men had been greeted by cheering people; at every place, the women furnished the soldiers cold water and, in some cases, hot coffee, which was much appreciated.

On arrival in Chambersburg, the regiment made camp and was joined by other units. Pier mentions “the 4th Conn. Regiment, and Penn. 11th came in this morning – encamped with us. Wilson’s N.Y. Zouaves will be here this noon. These four form a brigade, which our regiments leads.”³⁵

Sunday, June 16, the Pier’s unit received orders to break camp and head south to Hagerstown, Maryland, where they again encamped, this time closer to the front. The move into Maryland provided an opportunity for the soldiers to see what life was like below the Mason-Dixon Line. The men were cautioned to be careful, as they were among the “secessionists,” although Maryland had not seceded, and they were to be careful of what they ate and drank. Pier mentions that there were plenty of Negroes on the streets, along with an equal number of mules.³⁶ Both presumably were novel to his experience. Pier also mentioned camp followers, “girls who are constantly during the day, in our streets, selling bread, pies, cakes, tobacco, writing material &c, &c, and their numbers seem to increase daily. The prices are from 50 to 100 per cent above those in Fond du Lac.”³⁷ It must have been an impressive change in culture for a young man from small-town Wisconsin.

³⁵ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter VII, June 22, 1861.

³⁶ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter VII, June 22, 1861.

³⁷ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter X, July 6, 1861.

The men were anxious to get into combat. The first few days at Hagerstown were filled with rumors of possible marches and possible action. Nothing came of these rumors, except that at midnight, Monday, June 17, the drums sounded, and the company was ordered to cross the Potomac River at Washington D.C. and head to Williamsport, Virginia to confront a group of secessionists. The men received an allotment of ammunition, knapsacks were slung over their backs, and they headed out on a clear night to march the ten miles to Williamsport. Arriving just after dawn, the company was disappointed to learn that the rebels had retreated before the Union troops arrived. After resting all afternoon, the men headed back to their camp at Hagerstown to wait for their next orders.³⁸

As the 1st Wisconsin continued to wait at Hagerstown, they filled their time by drilling five hours a day. Drill was divided into two periods early in the morning and in the evening, in order to avoid having the men outside all day in the hot sun, wasting their energy for no real reason. But this training was different from the close order drills they had experienced at Camp Scott. Now the men were training for work as skirmishers. It appears the troops liked this new type of drill, as it involved a lot of quick movements and provided the soldiers the opportunity to move on their own without orders from their commander.³⁹ On June 29, the men were told to pack up once more, as they were to be repositioned nearer the Potomac River. Three days later, on July 1, the Colonel ordered the troops to move out, this time into the interior of Virginia. The men had to maintain guard at all times, as the enemy was known to be nearby and appeared to be in strength.

The 1st Wisconsin reached Virginia on July 2. Colwert Pier's regiment was attached to a division under the command of Major General Robert Patterson. Patterson's division crossed the Potomac River near Williamsport and was marching on the main road toward Martinsburg, Virginia when Brigadier General Thomas (soon to be christened "Stonewall") Jackson's Confederate division confronted the larger body of Union troops near Hoke's Run, located in present-day West Virginia. General Patterson ordered the men forward, with Pennsylvania troops flanking Pier's unit's right.

³⁸ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter IX, June 29, 1861.

³⁹ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter X, July 6, 1861.

Patterson's men continued forward, and the fighting became more general as the men came close enough to see the enemy. Soldiers stood in wheat fields firing, using sheaves of grain for cover while they reloaded. The artillery followed the men, firing towards the enemy. Pier reported the bullets flying right overhead and getting closer. He saw several wounded soldiers carried from the field. Pier's regiment was ordered to deploy as skirmishers, and they extended out their front about three miles in all directions looking for the enemy.⁴⁰ As a result of this small skirmish at Falling Waters, Virginia, the Confederacy was left with ninety-one casualties and the Union army with twenty-three. A member of the 1st Wisconsin's Company A who had predicted to his friends before the battle that he was going to be the first to fall indeed became the first Wisconsin soldier to die in the Civil War.⁴¹ Following this skirmish, the Union army occupied Martinsburg and remained there until July 15, when Patterson withdrew his command to Harper's Ferry.⁴²

Jackson's Confederates had fulfilled their assignment, withdrawing slowly as planned before Patterson's larger force. Unbeknownst to Pier, Patterson's inactivity played a major role in the Union defeat at the Battle of First Manassas, or Bull Run, on July 21. Patterson's failure to move against the Shenandoah Valley released Confederate troops who arrived by rail to reinforce General P. G. T. Beauregard at Bull Run, precipitating a rout of General Irwin McDowell's Union army by the Southerners. This defeat ensured that the war would not be ended by the termination date of Colwert Pier's ninety-day enlistment.

Pier's action at the Battle of Falling Waters was only a small taste of a battle, but to the men who had fought there, it seemed at the time that they had won the war. Pier, excited by the battle, wrote home that he saw a couple of dead Confederate soldiers lying in a wheat field.⁴³ Perhaps a growing realization of the trivial character of this battle helped motivate Colwert Pier to reenlist later in the war, for Falling Waters became

⁴⁰ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XI, July 13, 1861.

⁴¹ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, December, 1995.

⁴² Shelby Foote, *The Civil War a Narrative: Fort Sumter to Perryville*, (New York: Random House Inc. 1974) 57.

⁴³ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, December 1995.

increasingly less credible as a platform for his post war plans. A year later, the skirmish was considered a joke among veterans.

A majority of the soldiers who fought in the Battle of Falling Waters were inexperienced ninety-day volunteers whose terms of enlistment were rapidly coming to an end. Pier described how efforts were made to encourage the men to extend their enlistments, but there were few takers, despite these soldiers' earlier enthusiasm for war.

The encamped men at Martinsburg waited for more orders to come, but Patterson remained inactive. They experienced several false alarms, including being called out in the middle of the night because a guard saw something move in the bushes and fired a shot. On another occasion, the 1st Wisconsin was supposed to form as skirmishers to find the enemy, but at the last minute this order was countermanded. Therefore, the 1st Wisconsin had nothing to do but sit in the hot Virginia summer sun and wait anxiously for the big battle that was rumored to be coming. The men even had an opportunity to do some sightseeing in Charlestown, Virginia, where they viewed John Brown's courthouse, prison, and place of execution.⁴⁴

After remaining for twenty-three days in enemy territory, Pier's unit recrossed the Potomac without further incident. The troops camped on the north bank, overlooking the river, where they could see every movement that was made by nearby Confederate troops, and vice versa. The men were on strict alert; no one could leave camp without a permit, and half the camp was on guard duty every twenty-four hours. Pickets of both armies were stationed opposite each other. At first they tried to stay out of sight, hiding behind fences and trees. Occasionally the sentries would exchange volleys. Wisconsin soldiers eventually took the initiative to show themselves to the enemy repeatedly, and after a short time the two sides stopped shooting and agreed to talk. This informal truce allowed Pier's friend, Christian Klock, and another "Badger Boy" to meet their enemies in the middle of the river.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XIV, August 3, 1861. An ardent abolitionist, John Brown launched a raid against the Federal arsenal at Harper's Ferry in order to trigger a slave rebellion in October 1859. He was captured, tried, convicted, and hanged for the crime, thereby becoming a martyr to the cause of freeing the slaves.

⁴⁵ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XV, August 10, 1861.

Sunday, August 11, the men were informed of the route that they expected to follow during their return trip to Milwaukee, as their ninety-day enlistment was finally completed. They expected to arrive in Milwaukee Thursday evening, August 15, 1861. If they received their final army pay on time, a disbursement scheduled to take place in Milwaukee, they expected they would be back in Fond du Lac on Saturday.⁴⁶ The trip actually took a week longer, for the group did not reach home until August 23. As their train pulled into the depot in Fond du Lac, a huge crowd of cheering friends, family, and loved ones greeted them. The Northwestern Band escorted the Company to Amory Hall, where the Honorable C.A. Eldridge, Republican state senator from Fond du Lac, delivered the address to welcome home the soldiers.⁴⁷ Following his remarks, Captain McCall addressed the group for the last time, thanking them for their service. The boys then broke ranks and headed home for the first time in four months, their duty to the Union war effort now over.⁴⁸ The troops that went out with the expectation that they would end the rebellion had returned home with a sense of accomplishment but without success; Pier himself, already the politician, now styled the “Badger Boys” as an “emergency army” that had been formed to hold until the “real” army could be readied.

Once the 1st Wisconsin reached home safely, Colwert Pier resumed his study of law at the office of James M. Gillett and Judge W.D. Conklin.⁴⁹ While Pier lived at home, he must have had a hard time getting the war out of his mind, for he kept an active interest in the war effort. He participated in every recruiting rally that was held in the Fond du Lac area. Since Pier already had served a brief tour, he was presumably asked to say a few words to stir up the crowd and encourage them to enlist. Pier also kept a deep interest in the formation of new companies, as he considered reenlisting himself, under the right conditions.

⁴⁶ *Fond du Lac Saturday Reporter*, Letter XIV, August 16, 1861.

⁴⁷ *History of Fond du Lac County, 1880*, 801-802.

⁴⁸ *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 24, 1861.

⁴⁹ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1880. Judge Conklin served one term as County Judge in Fond du Lac, two terms as alderman, and six years as municipal judge. *History of Fond du Lac County 1880*, 791. James M. Gillett moved to Fond du Lac in 1846 from New York. He founded a Whig newspaper, forerunner to *The Commonwealth*. After winning an important case, he became Fond du Lac’s top lawyer for more than thirty years. *History of Fond du Lac County 1880*, 481.

During the later part of 1862 or early 1863, Pier began to form his own militia company, and the men he recruited elected him captain. This allowed Pier the opportunity to petition the governor for a commission as a militia officer and consequently gave him an opportunity to reenter the war, this time as an officer. At this point Pier's request was purely political in nature, and he was no doubt positioning himself for a possible political career. The Pier family evidently had its share of enemies, however, for opposition to his request was strong. "Violent political opponents of the captain joined in a written protest to Governor Harvey to withhold his commission. The contest became excessively bitter[,] but the governor sent him his commission."⁵⁰ With his commission in hand, Pier worked to form nine more companies so he could command a regiment. The commissioned officers then proceeded to elect him colonel at the youthful age of twenty-one. The governor commissioned Pier as colonel of the militia regiment, and the new colonel duly forwarded a request to the Federal Government for activation of his fledgling militia regiment.

The War Department in Washington was typically skeptical of such untrained political officers, and it initially declined the offer. Pier subsequently explained this reluctance with a strange tale that the war was nearly over and that the government needed no more new troops. This rebuff evidently was a huge disappointment for Pier, and as time went by with still no call to duty, he became depressed.⁵¹ In 1864 General Ulysses S. Grant took command of the entire Union army, and his plans required major expansion of the army, including three new regiments to be raised in Wisconsin.⁵² Governor Lewis ordered the formation of three new regiments, the 36th, 37th, and 38th. Pier's unit became the 38th Wisconsin regiment.⁵³

Twenty-five years later, the story of Colwert Pier's reenlistment was embroidered with a tale of filial devotion that included many characteristic mid-Victorian sentiments and embellishments of domestic drama. According to this version, one evening Pier was sitting at home, when a messenger approached with an urgent message from Madison:

⁵⁰ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1880.

⁵¹ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1880.

⁵² General U. S. Grant was commander of the Union Army during 1864-1865 and later served as President of the United States, 1869-1877.

⁵³ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1880.

“will you accept a commission as lieutenant-colonel of the thirty-eighth regiment? Answer immediately.”⁵⁴ According to the story, Pier went in search of his father and showed him the telegram. His father told him to ask his mother. Pier went to his ailing mother’s bedside, and he read her the telegram from the governor. “Her eyes filled with tears. With a trembling voice she said, ‘Do as you think best my boy; I will be satisfied with your decision.’”⁵⁵ Within six days, Pier was on his way to Madison for training. Of course this tale rings rather false in the context of Pier’s many efforts to obtain his commission, but it must have played well to local audiences after the war, particularly those in Milwaukee who may not have known the real story.⁵⁶

Pier had asked his friends from his old regiment to join him, and many enthusiastically accepted his invitation. The new soldiers were sent to Camp Randall in Madison to train. Named for Governor Alexander Randall, Camp Randall was located on the campus of the present day University of Wisconsin. Its 42 acres extended from University Avenue to Monroe Street between Breeze Terrace and Randall Avenue. The land had been donated to the state legislature by the State Agricultural Society.⁵⁷

At Camp Randall, Colwert Pier faced a handicap in efforts to bring his regiment up to strength. Despite the existence of a military draft, conscription was not of much use in bringing soldiers into Pier’s particular unit, and persuasion was still necessary to get men to join the new Wisconsin regiment. Wisconsin’s German Catholics, many of whom had left Europe in order to avoid military service, were a particularly poor source of drafted manpower for the Union, and there were even anti-draft riots in Wisconsin. Other ethnic groups in the state had already responded strongly to the call for volunteers, and this meant that the draft might not be applied to those communities.

In general, conscription proved rather ineffective, save as an incentive to voluntary recruitment. By 1863, it had become clear that some form of compulsion would be necessary in order to maintain adequate Union forces in the field. Conscription

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, July 1996.

⁵⁶ This was the last time Pier saw his mother, for she died August 21, 1864, while Pier was participating in the Siege of Petersburg.

⁵⁷ Roberts, Robert B. *Encyclopedia of Historic Forts*, (MacMillan Publishing Company, 1988). http://secondwi.com/wisconsin_civil_war_campscamp_ba.htm. (06 Apr. 2002)

was instituted as a means to stimulate enlistment through encouraging states to offer enlistment bonuses and bounties in order to avoid the distasteful alternative of having to draft their citizens. Congress authorized a Provost Marshal Bureau to oversee the draft, and the Bureau sent marshals to each congressional district to enroll all men between the ages of twenty to forty-five. In the first draft held by the Government in July 1863, twenty per cent of those enrolled were called up. In 1864, the Federal Government issued recruiting quotas for each district, and those districts that did not meet the quota held drafts to produce the required number of soldiers. Only about 50,000 men were actually drafted, while 120,000 substitutes were procured.⁵⁸

Potential draftees had several ways to avoid the military. Nearly one fifth of all those drafted in the four military drafts of 1864 fled to Canada or to the Western territories. Those who did report to the Provost Marshal office were sent home if the district had already reached its quota. Several thousand men were dismissed after failing physicals or successfully pleading that they were sole providers for families that would face economic hardship if they served. Even soldiers who passed their physicals still had a few options to avoid service. Wealthy draftees hired substitutes, which gave permanent exemption. Alternatively, they paid a commutation fee of \$300, which exempted an individual from only the present draft but not subsequent calls, although this mechanism was soon limited to conscientious objectors. Substitutes were drawn from young men not old enough to be drafted and immigrants who were not citizens and therefore not liable to the draft.⁵⁹

One mechanism used to recruit Wisconsin men in 1864 was to raise a force of three regiments composed of short-term volunteers who would serve 100 days. The theory was that these short terms of enlistment would be more attractive, and these troops could protect lines of communication and maintain order, thus freeing longer-term soldiers for the actual field armies.⁶⁰ This recruitment feature, however, did Pier no good in augmenting his regiment, for he was seeking a group of men willing to undertake long-

⁵⁸ *Dictionary of American History*, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1940), I, 112.

⁵⁹ McPherson, 600-601.

⁶⁰ Frank Klement, *Wisconsin in the Civil War*, (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1997), 98.

term service with the fighting army. If anything, the existence of these units made his recruiting job harder.

The war was no longer the happy-go-lucky camping trip that Pier had described in 1861. People had heard horror stories of bloody battles, seen the long casualty lists from the 1862 battles at Shiloh, Antietam, and Fredericksburg, and had heard from soldiers who already returned. Not many were interested in fighting and the attendant dangers of military life. To fill his regiment, Pier therefore relied on his friends and other local recruits who might still be looking for the thrill of the fight. From these sources, only four companies could be mustered into service in the 38th Wisconsin by April 15, 1864.

Pier, along with regimental commander Colonel James Bintliff, spent the next several weeks drilling the under-strength regiment into shape and providing the men with the basic rudiments of military skills in order to prepare them to fight.⁶¹ On May 3, orders arrived that Lieutenant Colonel Colwert Pier should lead the four companies of the 38th Wisconsin east to serve in the Army of the Potomac under the command of General Ulysses S. Grant.

Arriving in Washington on May 7, Pier's four companies quickly marched to Arlington, Virginia, where they set up camp and resumed drilling, waiting for new orders to arrive. For the time being, the 38th was attached to Casey's Provisional Brigade, XXII Army Corps. The men remained in this camp until May 30, when they moved to White House, Virginia and temporarily joined the 1st Minnesota regiment.

At this time, the Army of the Potomac was maneuvering against the Confederate capital of Richmond. The 38th Regiment, as a new and green unit, was assigned responsibility for guarding the army's supply train at Cold Harbor, just as a fierce and bloody battle was commencing.⁶²

On June 3, the Army of the Potomac moved forward. General Grant called for a three-pronged attack by II, XVIII, and IX Corps directed against vague and widely spaced objectives. This frontal assault against the Confederates entrenched on the Bethesda-Cold Harbor line proved to be disastrous. As they approached the Rebels, the men were

⁶¹ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, December, 1995. Colonel James Bintliff, from Monroe, Wisconsin, served with the 22nd and 38th Wisconsin regiments. Klement, 105.

⁶² *National Park Service: Civil War Soldiers and Sailors System*.

exposed to direct fire and were picked off one by one. The attackers, realizing they were in trouble, huddled together, searching for any cover they could find. The attack lasted roughly eight minutes, but it proved to be a deadly mistake by Grant. His command lost over 7,000 men in one day, a majority of the casualties in those first eight minutes. Of all General Grant's military decisions, this was the one that he regretted the most.⁶³

The inconclusive fighting at Cold Harbor lasted until June 12, when the Army of the Potomac's II Corps, under General Winfield Scott Hancock, moved across the James River and toward Petersburg, Virginia, followed by the rest of the army on June 15. Pier's unit was engaged only in minor actions during the final few days of Cold Harbor, and the regiment came through this fighting with the loss of only a few men, but Cold Harbor finally provided Colwert Pier and the 38th Wisconsin regiment with a taste of serious fighting.⁶⁴

The Union army's move on Petersburg was an effort to isolate Richmond by seizing its railroad supply lines, most of which funneled through the city of Petersburg, some 25 miles to the south. Initial efforts to assault the poorly defended Confederate line on June 15 failed through lack of coordination. Consequently, the Army of the Potomac settled in for a long siege in which the Union forces attempted to break the Confederate entrenchments. Because the Union forces were not large enough to completely invest Petersburg, assaults were punctuated with flanking moves designed to sever the more westerly railroads leading into Petersburg that were still under Southern control.

At Petersburg, Pier's 38th regiment was assigned to General Ambrose Burnside's IX Army Corps, 1st Division, which was led by Brevet Major General Orlando B. Willcox.⁶⁵ His unit played a role in the early, inconclusive attacks that attempted to break the Confederate line. On the evening of June 16, Pier's unit took up a position in front of the enemy works along Baxter Road east of Petersburg, on the left of II Corps, in support of their attack. A short time later, under cover of dark, the Federals broke through the

<http://www.itd.nps.gov/cwss/regiments.htm> (March 18, 2002).

⁶³ Shelby Foote, *The Civil War A Narrative: Red River to Appamattox*, (New York: Random House Inc, 1974), 190-191; *National Park Service: American Battlefield Protection Program*, Heritage Preservation Services. <http://www.2cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/va062.htm> (March 18, 2002).

⁶⁴ *Milwaukee Sunday Telegraph*, April 25, 1880.

⁶⁵ Noah Trudeau, *The Last Citadel: Petersburg, Virginia June 1864-April 1865*, (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1991), 49.

Confederate line, but they suffered severe casualties.⁶⁶ During the early morning hours of June 17, the IX Corps sneaked quietly into a ravine deep within the Confederate position. Men of Pier's 1st Division supported the attack by the 2nd Division. The "men burst forward at 3:00 a.m. and took four guns, five flags, 600 prisoners, and 1,500 stands of arms," a great tactical success.⁶⁷ At two that afternoon the IX Corps led another charge on the Confederate position. This time, the Confederates were waiting, the Union attack was mismanaged, and it only succeeded in wrecking one of the Union brigades, while little ground was gained. A third attack by IX Corps' 3rd Division commenced at 6:00 p.m. The Federals broke through briefly but were unsupported and were driven back by an evening counterattack.⁶⁸ The inconclusive fighting had cost the Army of the Potomac 11,000 casualties during June 15-18.

During each of three days (June 16-18), Colwert Pier was injured in battle. "He was grazed by a bullet on the forehead, was shot in the fleshy part of the leg, and an ugly fragment of a shell hit him on the instep, the latter giving him much pain. But all three failed to drive him from the field, despite greatly weakening him through the loss of blood."⁶⁹ Pier wrote of his siege that his unit "shot days and worked nights: it was dangerous to be safe anywhere, as the opposing lines were within a stones-throw of each other: the rebels shot to kill and killed by the thousands. We returned their compliments and probably threw two pounds of lead and iron to their one."⁷⁰

Robert E. Lee's Army of Northern Virginia now belatedly moved southward to reinforce General P. G. T. Beauregard's handful of Petersburg defenders. By June 18, it appeared that the IX Corps would dig in for the long term, as they crossed the shallow Poor Creek and settled on a sloping hill west of the creek. This position gave the Corps a prime view of the Confederate front line.⁷¹ They stayed there a few days, and this allowed the men to fire a few rounds at the enemy forces in order to keep them occupied while plans to develop the siege unfolded.

⁶⁶ Trudeau, 47.

⁶⁷ Trudeau, 49.

⁶⁸ Trudeau, 50.

⁶⁹ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, December 1995.

⁷⁰ William Love, *Wisconsin in the War of the Rebellion*, (Madison: Church & Goodman, 1866).

⁷¹ Trudeau, 99.

Within a few weeks, engineers of the 48th Pennsylvania regiment dug a mine in the IX Corps sector where the two sides' positions ran only 400 feet apart. The Federal troops planned to explode the mine under the Confederate position. Their tunnel was about four and a half feet high, nearly as many feet wide at the bottom and two feet wide at the top, and the tunnel stretched for nearly five hundred feet in length. By July 17, the main gallery leading to the Confederate lines was completed. The Union miners continued to branch out left and right, "running lateral galleries nearly forty feet each way, parallel to and slightly to the rear of the main Confederate trench line." The mine was completed by July 23 and was ready to be loaded with explosives.⁷²

On July 17, Pier's regiment moved into the front line trenches to get ready for the battle. Here Pier suffered another minor injury as a shell fragment wounded him. On July 30, Pier's Company B was stationed on the extreme front on the flank of the attack, with the remaining three companies of his regiment occupying positions along the second line in support. The attack was spearheaded by James Ledlie's 1st Division, flanked by the 2nd (Robert Potter) and 3rd (Orlando Willcox) Divisions, including Pier's undersized regiment. These latter units, it was planned, would seize trenches along the flanks of the crater, while the 1st Division penetrated the crater itself. Upon hearing the first explosion of the mine, Companies B and E of Pier's command led the charge. The two companies numbered less than one hundred men as they started to advance upon the enemy. They took enfilading artillery fire from batteries that had been placed by alert Confederates who suspected the presence of a mine, but they advanced to occupy the enemy trench line, a position they held until 3:00 p.m., when they were ordered to return to their previous trenches, a movement executed under heavy fire. About this action, Pier wrote, "my decimated command used 5 thousand rounds of ball cartridges every 24 hours: the graveyard behind the hill hourly increased its membership, and if a man left his position or stood upright, he did so at the peril of his life."⁷³ The attack had been broken up by artillery and mortar fire, but the fiasco had been poorly conceived, plagued by animosity between the Army Commander, George Meade, and his erstwhile commander, now turned subordinate, Ambrose Burnside, and doomed when the key leadership role was

⁷² Trudeau, 105.

assigned by Burnside to a drunken incompetent, General James Ledlie.⁷⁴ Both Burnside and Ledlie were stripped of their commands as a result of the fiasco. Pier's unit was fortunate not to be destroyed in the slaughter of Union soldiers within the crater.

Pier suffered four minor injuries at the Siege of Petersburg, and he was lucky that he was not wounded severely enough to require medical attention. Soldiers were often better off if they did not go to the field hospital. Dangers of infection were not well understood. In order to avoid gangrene, the standard practice was to amputate injured limbs, and the resulting shock killed many. Soldiers injured on the battlefield were collected "by untrained and haphazardly controlled volunteers who frequently were shirkers. Wounded soldiers were taken to field hospitals, where they were met by a surgeon. The most serious cases were dealt with first, normally by amputation."⁷⁵ Surgery in the Union army was painful and barbarous. Men sometimes totally lacking in skill commonly undertook the most serious operations. A patient was lucky if an anesthetic was available, for in many cases it was not. Soldiers were forced to go through major operations with only a little whiskey to dull the pain produced by knife and saw.⁷⁶

Following the disaster of the Crater, during the month of August, the task of IX Corps was to seize and protect the Weldon Railroad line in order to cut off the supply lines south of Petersburg. The IX Corps was stationed west of the Jerusalem Plank Road, south of Petersburg. Pier's men were held in reserve, next to the Globe Tavern, as the Confederates launched a quick raid designed to recover the railroad. As the line held by Brigadier General Samuel Crawford's V Army Corps, 3rd Division collapsed under heavy fire on August 19, Pier's division was ordered to attack and did so with an enthusiastic shout. Brevet General Orlando Willcox led the 1st Division. The Confederates had not expected the IX Corps' attack, as Pier's group ran through Crawford's collapsing line toward the Rebels.⁷⁷ August 20 saw more action along the Jerusalem Plank Road, where Pier's division was located. The fighting continued indecisively. Around midmorning, as the Confederates opened fire along Vaughn Road, the Union infantrymen ducked for

⁷³ Love, 947.

⁷⁴ Jim Epperson, "Siege of Petersburg: The Crater," www.members.aol.com/siege1864/.

⁷⁵ Wiley, 142.

⁷⁶ Wiley, 147.

⁷⁷ Trudeau, 166-167.

cover and regrouped. Federal pickets drove forward, and this allowed the rest of the Union army the opportunity to check the Confederate advance and to reinforce the lines. The Confederates tried to turn and find an open Union flank, but they found no gap.⁷⁸ This left the Confederates with few options: They could continue to march forward into an onslaught of Union fire, turn and retreat, or surrender. A majority of the Rebels turned and retreated, and this gave the Union a victory at Weldon, the main line running south from Petersburg. The Union troops, however, let the Rebels retreat and failed to pursue them. Following the successful lodgment at Weldon Station, Pier's division, along with others, had the responsibility to destroy the railroad. This destruction continued for some time. Wrecking this line cut the rail link between Richmond and the last seaport in Confederate hands, Wilmington, North Carolina. Loss of this route forced the Confederates to unload railroad cars and bring supplies to the Petersburg garrison by wagon up the Boydton Plank road, a distance of 30 miles.

While, Pier's men rested at Weldon Station, the Confederates launched a surprise attack on the Union forces down the road at Reams Station. They drove the Federals off the railroad, winning a temporary victory. General Meade ordered Pier's division to "double step" to Reams Station and help turn back the Confederate troops.⁷⁹ Pier's unit was several miles and a few hours from General Hancock's II Corps, which consequently was forced to defend itself, unsupported. After putting up a stiff resistance, Hancock's men retreated before the IX Corps could intervene.⁸⁰ This Confederate success thwarted further damage to the railroad, keeping the supply line intact.

Pier's regiment continued to see minor engagements during the rest of 1864. One such fight took place at Poplar Springs Church. The Union forces made repeated efforts to drive westward in order to cut off remaining roads and railroads leading to Petersburg from the west and south. The IX Corps, along with several divisions of the V Corps, marched south of Petersburg. The IX Corps' responsibility was to clear the roadway and take up a supporting position on the V Corps' left. Once Pier's division was in place, the order to charge was given, and the men moved forward quickly. The bullets and shells

⁷⁸ C.K. Pier *Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, July 1995.

⁷⁹ General George Meade was commander of the Army of the Potomac under General Grant.

⁸⁰ Trudeau, 186.

from the Rebel position had no effect as the lines pressed forward. The Confederates had no choice but to turn and run, as they were severely outnumbered.⁸¹

Overall, however, the Union's autumn efforts to cut Petersburg's last supply lines to the interior failed. Thursday, October 26, Pier and his division marched towards Boydton Plank Road, further to the west, where they waited for an attack on the Rebels that was soon to commence (the Battle of Burgess Mill). This was one of the few times, in which Pier's men had to march through wooded and rocky terrain to reach the battlefield.⁸² After an early advance by the Union forces on October 27 that gained a portion of Boydton Plank Road, the Confederates counter-attacked that same afternoon and drove the Federal forces back across the road in yet another Confederate tactical victory.⁸³

Pier's division stayed in this area throughout the winter, waiting to resume the campaign in early spring. During this time, Colwert Pier received some startling news. In a deadly battle at Fort Stedman on March 25, 1865 the 109th New York infantry, regiment had seen all its officers killed in action as this unit fought to recapture a fort taken by a surprise Confederate assault. Lieutenant Colonel Colwert Pier was now assigned to command this leaderless regiment. James Bintliff, Colonel of the 38th Wisconsin, had by this time joined the regiment, rendering Pier redundant in command of the 38th. This was an appointment that Pier did not want, for it would separate him from friends and companions. Pier was not a trained officer, but he had seen some significant soldiering and had doubtless learned a lot. Presumably, his bravery and effective leadership at Petersburg had led him to be singled out for this command. He reluctantly accepted the appointment and vowed he would do his best. Just as Pier did not want the appointment, neither did the men of the 109th New York. They thought it was an insult to have a young kid from Wisconsin who appeared to be a "political soldier" take command of their seasoned, veteran regiment. One of Pier's first orders as leader of his new regiment was to command a dress parade in full view of the enemy, while taking fire from the Rebels. One of the members of the 109th, speaking of this event, said; "The

⁸¹ Trudeau, 212.

⁸² Trudeau, 230.

⁸³ National Park Service National Park Service, Heritage Protection Services.

Adjutant read the order and, Col. Pier advancing to his side said to the officers in line ‘this Order is as objectionable to me as to you and I will have it revoked as soon as I can; in the meantime, we must remember we are soldiers. You expect me to do my duty as I know you will do yours.’⁸⁴ Apparently, this honest statement helped cement a better relationship between the new regimental commander and the New Yorkers.

On March 25, in his first leadership role as commander of the 109th, Pier led his new unit into battle at Fort Stedman, located in a salient near the east end of the Confederate Petersburg fortifications. The fort had fallen into the hands of the Confederacy again, and the Union was busy making plans to attack once more. The Union forces made their way around the Fort and opened fire on the enemy. After a short time, the fort was taken by the Union troops, and the fight moved to nearby Fort Haskell. The Confederates tried to attack this fort in the dark, but they were surprised by the strength of the opposition and were driven back. The Federal force extended eastward to outflank the advancing Confederate line. Under a heavy barrage of fire, the Confederates were forced to retreat once more.⁸⁵ During this battle, Pier earned the respect of his men, as he helped to lead the capture of Fort Stedman. This battle resulted in the capture of 2,000 prisoners and badly depleted Confederate reserves.⁸⁶ From this point on, Pier faced no difficulties with the New York regiment, and they were willing to do whatever it took to please him. As a parting gift, he received a new horse and saddle from the New Yorkers, and he ended the war having been promoted to colonel.⁸⁷

Pier and his New Yorkers also played a role in the final battle for Petersburg on April 2. Pier and his men, together with the rest of the IX Corps, surrounded Fort Mahone, but under intense pressure from the Rebels, the North was forced to retreat a little. This minor retreat gave the South a false hope of success. The IX Corps was in trouble, some regiments seemed to lose control, and others were running low on ammunition. Soldiers tried to restock their ammunition supplies, but to do this they

<http://www2cr.nps.gov/abpp/battles/va079.htm>.

⁸⁴ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, July 1996.

⁸⁵ Trudeau, 346.

⁸⁶ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1 Newsletter*, February 1996.

⁸⁷ David Olsky, “The Pier Family: Wisconsin Pioneers,” available at www.stanford.edu/group/WLHP/profiles/PierColwert.shtml.

needed to cross the dangerous no-man's land. Many of those who attempted the crossing were killed. The Confederates counterattacked, and this assault started to drive the Union soldiers back from the Fort. Just in the nick of time, they were reinforced by a brigade from VI Corps and the Army Provost brigade, whereupon a deadly fight broke out between the two sides. The North continued the push through no-man's land in pursuit of the Confederates, many paying with their lives, but the Confederates' final push of the war was stalemated. The Confederates considered another counterattack, but before they could get organized General Lee, commander of the Army of Northern Virginia, ordered a retreat, due to VI Corps' breakthrough on the Boydton Plank Road west of Petersburg. Under cover of darkness in the early morning hours of April 3, General Lee led his men out of Petersburg, and the siege was finally over.⁸⁸ Pier and the 109th continued to chase General Lee and the Rebel army until they reached Appomattox Court House, where General Lee surrendered to General Grant, ending America's bloodiest war.

Following Lee's surrender, Pier continued to lead the 109th New York regiment, marching them to the nation's capital. There, despite the insistence of his men that he lead them back to their home state of New York, Pier relinquished command of the 109th. After an emotional farewell, he accepted command once more of his old regiment, the 38th Wisconsin, and he led his men down Pennsylvania Avenue in the Army of the Potomac's victory parade.⁸⁹ Following his discharge from service in August 1865, Pier led his regiment home. A year and a half earlier, he had left the state with a group of young inexperienced men. Now he commanded a veteran unit.

At the beginning of the Civil War, Colwert Pier had seen an opportunity to make a name for himself in his community. While he came from a distinguished family in Fond du Lac, he wanted to do something worthy of recognition. This led him to sign up for his ninety-day enlistment with the 1st Wisconsin. During his few months in the service, Pier sought public recognition through the letters he wrote to the local newspaper under the transparent pseudonym "Trowloc." After returning home, and as the war continued, Pier probably soon realized that his first efforts had not done much to further his political aspirations. He formed a militia unit, while petitioning the governor to give him a

⁸⁸ Trudeau, 364-365.

commission as an officer. Eventually surmounting political opposition, he was commissioned Lieutenant Colonel of the 38th Wisconsin Regiment and headed east once more to take part in the final year of the war.

In combat at Petersburg, the young man who went to war in the spring of 1861 as a result of a combination of patriotic enthusiasm, youthful adventure, and personal ambition became a real soldier and a leader. Pier served the 38th Wisconsin regiment bravely and with honor, refusing to leave battle even after being repeatedly wounded and losing much blood. The most significant indication of his growth and success as a leader was his assignment to command the 109th New York regiment after their officers were killed in battle. This new command was not an easy one for him, for he was no longer among friends and supporters from home, but he earned the respect of the men of the 109th through his cool, calm nature in battle. Pier's experiences came full circle during the war. Entering the conflict as a callow youth off on a summer lark, he emerged as a veteran warrior and a respected leader of men, one who would play a major role in Wisconsin veterans' affairs for years to come.

Following the war, Pier continued to stay active in military reunions and became commander of the Fond du Lac post of the Grand Army of the Republic (G.A.R.). Pier played a pivotal role in developing the idea of a reunion for Civil War veterans. In 1881, his idea was realized in a meeting of thousands of former soldiers in Milwaukee. This reunion, which was attended by Generals Grant and Sheridan, served as an impetus for a great expansion of membership in the G.A.R., which increased from 6,000 to 500,000 after the reunion. The organization became an important force in national politics, lobbying Congress on behalf of pensions for veterans.⁹⁰

Pier became president of the Wisconsin Soldiers' Reunion association and played a key role in bringing a large Civil War soldiers reunion to Fond du Lac. In 1889, Pier was elected secretary of the executive board for the National G.A.R., which held an encampment in Fond du Lac that summer. Even after he moved to Milwaukee in 1888,

⁸⁹ *C.K. Pier Badger Camp #1*, newsletter, February 1996.

⁹⁰ *Milwaukee Telegraph*, April 20, 1895.

Pier continued to stay active in veterans' affairs, as he served as trustee of the E.B. Wolcott post in that city.

Colwert Pier worked as a successful lawyer in Fond du Lac until 1873, when his father died. He then inherited the family bank. He also owned a part interest in the *Fond du Lac Commonwealth* and wrote editorials for the newspaper during the early 1870s. In addition he managed the family farm, real estate, and businesses. In the 1880s, his wife, Kate, and their daughters, Kate Hamilton, Caroline, and Harriet, who all became attorneys, joined him in his legal practice.⁹¹

But his plans for a political career never were realized outside the realm of his beloved veterans' organizations. He was active in Republican politics on the state level, and he ran for public office once, in 1884, but he was defeated in the primary in a bid to become a state senator.

After the family law practice was transferred to the larger city, Pier remained in Milwaukee until his death from apoplexy in 1895. He was buried with military honors at the Pier Cemetery on Pioneer Road in Fond du Lac, not far from the cabin in which he had been born.⁹²

⁹¹ Olsky, 1-2.

⁹² *Fond du Lac Daily Commonwealth*, April 15, 1895.

*Reunion of Former Libby Prison Inmates,
Including Members of the Iron Brigade, Chicago, 1890*

Fond du Lac County's Responses to the Civil War

Anita Ewerdt

The American Civil War was a foundational element in the shaping of the nation's identity, and both contemporary and historical perceptions of the conflict remain central to American self-identity. American history courses commonly conceptualize the war as a major watershed. Memories and myths of families and neighbors divided also remain vividly alive in popular culture. Fond du Lac County's involvement in the Civil War has been customarily viewed by the entire community as one of honorable significance. Loyalty and a sincere effort to preserve the Union, combined with the sacrifice of those who fought and died, have long been seen as the essence of the city's experience. However, Fond du Lac's perceptions of the American Civil War changed over time as the conflict itself unfolded, generations that experienced the encounter aged and died, and as succeeding generations have reinterpreted their history.

Fond du Lac's responses to the war have passed through five distinct phases in which attitudes shifted as varying relationships to the combat emerged. Fond du Lac's initial phase saw the war as an adventure, coupled with a strong negative attitude toward Southern secession. This initial phase had the strongest impact on the perceptions of the times, and the deep sense of patriotism that informed this phase continues to be a part of Fond du Lac's understanding of its response today. This phase also shaped later phases in that, to this day, a sense of pride in the accomplishments of Fond du Lac's fighting men lives on. The second phase reflected a shift of attitude as a result of the devastating toll in lives and the hardships experienced by non-combatants, including the women at home who helped keep the community running. A third phase grew out of the ways in which Fond du Lac dealt with the consequences the Civil War, including the city's response to a group of Black "contrabands," or ex-slaves from plantations in the South, and the measures undertaken to deal with wounded and disabled veterans. The fourth phase reflected the perspective of an aging war-time generation seeking to commemorate their efforts in fighting for the Union. The fifth phase saw the Civil War fade as an emotion-driven reality to become a more abstract experience, more susceptible to analysis and understanding. These views reflected the attitudes of generations that no longer had a

direct experience of the conflict. Yet the War remains important in some ways, as demonstrated by the emphasis given to teaching about the war in local schools, while the phenomenon of a once popular and written-about War Between the States, the bloodiest conflict on American soil, is now a popular hobbyist's pastime.

The initial phase of Fond du Lac's experience of the war reflected an enthusiasm to preserve the Union and stop Southern secession. Scholars who have read the many early letters written by Union soldiers, including those from Fond du Lac, report a widely shared motivation: "fighting to maintain the best government on earth" was a common thought. It was a "great struggle for the Union, Constitution, and law."¹ Strong negative emotion toward secession of the Southern states was evident early in 1861. In addition, "many Americans had a romantic, glamorous idea of war."² However, as time went on, this view started to change. A war that most thought would be short turned into a five-year conflict in which more American lives were lost than died in all other wars the United States has fought.³

Even before the war began, Fond du Lac was heavily involved in discussing the secession crisis. As early as January 9, 1861, The Union Rifle Guard met at the Ridge Road School House in the town of Eldorado to discuss issues relating to an upcoming war. Local residents found time to meet and discuss the seriousness of national events that were unfolding. Participants included local businessmen, schoolteachers, and farmers.⁴

On December 20, 1860, South Carolina had seceded from the Union. Two days following this, Lincoln announced that he was determined to preserve the Union. South Carolina troops reacted by opening fire with their harbor batteries on the federal facilities at Fort Sumter in Charleston harbor. After a short bombardment, the fort surrendered on April 13, 1861, and Lincoln called for 75,000 volunteer troops to break up the rebellion.

Wisconsin residents immediately responded to Lincoln's request. "We must lick'em." "Southern rights be damned." "Charleston must be destroyed." "Jeff Davis

¹ James M. McPherson, *Battle Cry of Freedom*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 309.

² McPherson, 332.

³ McPherson, 6.

⁴ "The Union Rifle Guard Will Meet," *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, January 9, 1861.

should be hung.”” These were typical responses in Wisconsin, including Fond du Lac. “War, war, war, was the theme of every fireside and gathering; people felt that the secessionists had forfeited all their rights under the constitution by treasonably making war against our government.”⁵

Concern about secession flooded the thoughts of the Fond du Lac community. According to an article reproduced in the Fairwater Chronology, when the people of Fond du Lac and the surrounding area heard the news of the rebellion at Fort Sumter, the activities of everyday life just stopped.

The war feeling is so intense and absorbing that much of the business of our city has been stopped; men are collected in crowds on the streets and before the recruiting office of Col. Lefferts. Mechanics have left their shops, clerks their desks, printers their cases, laborers their usual employments, and all are prepared to take up their arms in defense of the flag of their country.⁶

Businesses closed. Merchants, bankers, lawyers, farmers and artisans questioned one another to learn every possible detail of this great crisis.⁷ Early enthusiastic support for the war can be seen in an April 17, 1861 article in Fond du Lac’s *Weekly Commonwealth*, describing a mass meeting of 350 citizens in Amory Hall, located in downtown Fond du Lac. This was the largest meeting held in Fond du Lac County up to that time. The meeting was held to discuss and make a fitting response to the call by President Lincoln to resist the “aggressiveness of traitors with arms.” A central feature of the meeting was a stirring speech by Edward S. Bragg.⁸ Bragg was Fond du Lac District Attorney and later became a local war hero as leader of the Iron Brigade. He used his wartime service to launch a successful political career. Mr. Bragg gave the following speech:

Citizen soldiers: In obedience to your patriotic impulses to defend the flag hallowed by the blood of patriots, the maintenance of which was bequeathed to you

⁵ Lance Herdegen, *The Men Stood Like Iron: How the Iron Brigade Won Its Name*, (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1997) 20, quoting Diary of George Fairfield, (State Historical Society of Wisconsin).

⁶ Fairwater Chronology: 1861-65. Civil War. Available online at http://www.wlhn.org/fond_du_lac/communities/fairwater/fairwaterchron2.htm.

⁷ Maurice McKenna, ed. *Fond du Lac County: Past and Present*, (Chicago: The S.J. Clarke Publishing Company, 1912), 147-9.

⁸ Attorney Edward Stuyvesant Bragg (1827-1912) was district attorney for the City of Fond du Lac and had been a delegate to the 1860 Democratic National Convention. He later became a general, commanding the famous Iron Brigade. His most notable military actions were fought as a Lieutenant Colonel of the Sixth Wisconsin Regiment at South Mountain and Antietam in 1862. McKenna, 148; Herdegen, 114-116.

as a legacy of a glorious ancestry, you are about to bid adieu to friends and kindred, to put off the garb of peace and assume the 'slow measured tread of grim visaged war.' In days of old, the knights 'did his devoir under the color of his ladye-love.' The remembrance of the sweet and sad parting cheered him when gloom was stealing o'er his spirit, and rendered doubly dear the achievements of his arm. In later days—in the times which tried men's souls—when women of America cheered the soul of the patriot; the mother gave her husband and son as willing offerings, and the maiden wiped the death-damp from the brow of her lover without a murmur. The race of noble men and women is not extinct. They are as ready now as then, at their country's call, to make the sacrifice.⁹

The reaction to this speech was an outpouring of patriotism and expressions of desire to preserve the Union. Bragg's speech clearly helped inspire enthusiasm, and he capitalized on it by organizing a company, "Bragg's Rifles," joining the many political officers who swelled Union ranks at the beginning of the war.¹⁰ A number of other factors fueled the Fond du Lac community's active opposition to Southern secession. Economics were at the heart of many people's concern. Wisconsin's industry and economy were suffering from a pre-war economic crisis. The panic of 1857 had strained businesses, and the impending war did not bode well for the future. "Wisconsin on the eve of the Civil War was not a confident, united, economically sound society."¹¹ Southern secession was seen as only creating more problems for infant industries in the Fond du Lac area.¹² Anxiety over secession produced a dramatic drop in lumber prices, weakening an industry that was based primarily in Oshkosh. Agriculture, Fond du Lac's largest industry at the time, was also not doing well. Farmers had accumulated debts through the purchase of new land and expensive machinery. Fond du Lac banks also faced a crisis on account of their dependence on bank notes that were secured by bonds issued by Southern states.

Conversely, economic difficulties actually helped stimulate early enlistments in Lincoln's volunteer army as a means to avoid unemployment. The hardships of military life were scarcely understood, and few predicted a long and bloody war. Therefore, the large number of volunteers from Fond du Lac who joined the Union Army in the spring

⁹ McKenna, 149.

¹⁰ Herdegen, 22, 193.

¹¹ Robert, Nesbit, *Wisconsin, A History*, (Madison: The State Historical Society of Wisconsin, 1973), 242.

¹² Nesbit, 267.

of 1861 was predictable on economic grounds, even without the additional stimuli of patriotism and youthful enthusiasm.¹³

The first military unit mustered in Fond du Lac was Company I of the 1st Wisconsin Regiment. This regiment left for the East on the Chicago & Northwestern Railway on May 2, with a large crowd of tearful yet excited citizens seeing off the troops. Fond du Lac's men and boys were finally going off to war.¹⁴

On May 25, 1861, a local paper reported that:

Fond du Lac County has furnished a greater number of volunteers than any other county in the State, not even excepting Milwaukee. We have now nine full companies, and three more nearly full, more than enough for one full regiment. Of these, six companies have enlisted for three years, or during the war.¹⁵

What the newspaper claimed was true. Fond du Lac County did supply the largest number of volunteers at the beginning of the war. It comes as no surprise, then, to find that Fond du Lac's aspiring soldiers were said to perform military drills wherever they could, in village parks, vacant lots, and pastures. Frustration with Southern secession was the prevalent attitude of the city, and talk of a war caught like wildfire in the streets of Fond du Lac. Numerous war assemblies were held in Fond du Lac as well as cities like Milwaukee and Baraboo.¹⁶ "The flag, the Union, the Constitution, and democracy—all were symbols or abstractions, but nevertheless powerful enough to evoke a willingness to fight and die for them."¹⁷

The fact that Fond du Lac at first supplied the most volunteers of any county in the state suggests that the county was experiencing almost a war-time mania, and it gives testament to Fond du Lac's intense opposition to the dissolution of the Union. Over the whole course of the war, Fond du Lac supplied over 2,000 volunteers to the Union Army. Among these soldiers were one major general, a brigadier, three colonels, two majors and four surgeons.¹⁸

¹³ Nesbit, 227.

¹⁴ Fairwater Chronology: 1861-65. Civil War

¹⁵ Fairwater Chronology: 1861-65. Civil War.

¹⁶ Herdegen, 20.

¹⁷ McPherson, 309.

¹⁸ Michael Mentzer, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier* (Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1999), 50.

Colwert Pier, a son of one of Fond du Lac's first residents, was the first in Fond du Lac to enlist in the Union Army.¹⁹ He had left Fond du Lac to attend law school at Lombard University in Galesburg, Illinois, but Pier returned to his hometown in 1859, where he was clerking for a local judge when Fort Sumter fell and the Civil War began. Pier and a friend answered President Lincoln's call for volunteers by signing up to join the Union Army on April 16, 1861. Many of his friends joined him.

Often brothers, cousins, or fathers and sons joined the same company or regiment. A sense of identity was clearly established in military units drawn from communities or from specific ethnic groups. This identity enhanced morale on both the home front and fighting fronts, but it could mean unexpected misfortune for a family or a neighborhood if a unit endured fifty percent or more casualties in a particular battle, as might be the case.²⁰

Often young men like Pier joined because of a sense of adventure. Patriotism was also strong in the local farm boys from Fond du Lac County. No one had to persuade those first soldiers to go. The processions, the loyal meetings, and the intense speech-making took on a different outlook in the months and years that followed, but fervor for the war was an unrefined emotion those days. Few seem to have reflected on the possibility of death in the early days of the conflict. The young soldiers were caught up in the patriotic excitement of the initial phase of the war.

A sense of adventure was not the only thing that filled the minds of young men. The war provided a way to establish status among their townsmen. Colwert Pier, Fond du Lac's first enlistee, had this exact thought on his mind. After serving out his initial, relatively uneventful 90-day term in the Union Army, Pier returned home almost before any major battles occurred. After some time passed and the war continued, Pier organized a company in Fond du Lac, and the company named him captain. Pier sought to raise nine more companies in order to form a regiment that he could command. Months later, after much pleading and begging by Pier, the governor telegraphed Pier to offer him a commission as Lieutenant Colonel of the 38th Wisconsin Regiment. The story

¹⁹ Rick Hamacher, "The Making of a Civil War Soldier: Colwert Pier of Fond du Lac," *supra* in this volume.

²⁰ McPherson, 326.

goes that Pier asked his mother, who was ill in bed, if he should go. With her eyes filled with tears and a trembling voice she said: “Do as you think best, my boy, I will be satisfied with your decision.” He then accepted the commission.²¹ But Pier had been actively seeking this appointment for over a year, and this overdramatic account of his sick mother’s sacrifice seems more likely to have been used by Pier to draw attention away from his previous lobbying.²²

The Fond du Lac “Badger Boys” of Company I, including Private Colwert Pier, were in the first group to depart from Fond du Lac on May 2, 1861. Crowds swarmed the streets and the train station to bid their goodbyes. The Badger Boys experienced their first fighting at the battle of Falling Waters. “It was a wild, harum-scarum battle, but the boys thought it was a big thing.” wrote Pier. Afterwards, this minor skirmish became a joke among the veterans and remains one to this day. The true brutality and slaughter of war were yet to be experienced.²³

Fond du Lac was privileged to have an individual with genuine military experience among its citizens, Charles Smith Hamilton. Hamilton had been a soldier in the Mexican War. Born in New York in November 1822, he graduated from the United States Military Academy in 1843 and joined the infantry. He performed well in the war with Mexico and was promoted to captain for bravery in skirmishes at Contreras and Churubusco. After being severely wounded at Molino del Rey, he resigned, and he took up farming in Fond du Lac in April 1853.²⁴

Hamilton evidently played a major role in preparing local soldiers. Camp Hamilton in Fond du Lac, located on what is now a small park called Plamore Park, was the place where many Fond du Lac enlistees began their training. Under the name Camp Hamilton, it was the training station for the 3rd, 6th and 14th Wisconsin Regiments.

A larger Civil War training facility was Camp Randall, located on the present day University of Wisconsin-Madison campus. More than 70,000 men were stationed and trained there. Many Fond du Lac men and boys joined the Union Army at Camp

²¹ “Return of the 38th Regiment: Our Fellow Citizen Lt. Col. Colwert Pier in Command,” *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, August 6, 1865.

²² Hamacher.

²³ McKenna, 152.

²⁴ <http://www.famousamericans.net/charlessmithhamilton/>

Randall.²⁵ Governor Alexander Randall (1819-1872), for whom the camp was named, constructed the first wartime Wisconsin Regiment there around five Milwaukee volunteer companies.²⁶

The first man from Wisconsin to be critically injured on a Southern battlefield was Lieutenant William A. Matthews of Company G, 1st Wisconsin Volunteers. He was severely wounded in battle in Virginia in July of 1861. He had enlisted from his home in Fond du Lac.²⁷ As casualty lists grew, citizens shifted from patriotic zeal, toward a wariness of battle and weariness of the war.

Perhaps the single greatest shock to people in Fond du Lac that was produced by the growing number of casualties came in the autumn of 1862. The 6th Wisconsin Regiment, organized at Camp Randall in 1861, suffered enormous casualties on September 14, 1862, at the Battle of South Mountain, and September 17, 1862, at the Battle of Antietam in Maryland. Eleven were killed and 79 wounded at South Mountain. Fifty of the remaining fewer than 200 men of the unit became casualties at Antietam.²⁸ Once the news of this horrific slaughter reached home, the citizens of Fond du Lac County began to look at the war differently, for the personal cost of war became increasingly clear. In addition, people in Fond du Lac had realized that the war would not end soon and the casualty lists were likely to grow much longer.

The true brutality of war is sometimes depicted in letters that were written home from soldiers in camps. Even in their mobilization and training camps, poor sanitation and disease killed many soldiers before they were ever exposed to battle, and infection killed many of the wounded after they were evacuated from the battlefield. An anonymous soldier from Fond du Lac County spoke of the bitterness of wounded men coming back to the camps: “Indeed Dear Miss there are thousands of poor soldiers that will see home and friends no more in this world. If you was in Keokuk and see the number of sick and disabled soldiers it would make your heart ache.”²⁹

²⁵ Nesbit, 256.

²⁶ Nesbit, 246.

²⁷ McKenna, 153.

²⁸ Herdegen, 186; Battle of Antietam on the Web, Lt. Col. Edward S. Bragg’s Reports. Available online at http://aotw.org/exhibit.php?exhibit_id=260

²⁹ <http://www.civilwarletters.com/home.html> An anonymous soldier from Fond du Lac County. This letter of October 24, 1863 was written at Camp Lincoln, Keokuk, Iowa.

Another letter written by a Fond du Lac man gives laconic evidence of the transition from a sense of adventure to realization of the difficulties of military encounters: “We have now been in the service of Uncle Sam over one year and have seen some of the hardships incident to a soldier’s life, and expect to see many more before the authority of the government is established.”³⁰

During his first service at war, Colwert Pier wrote letters home that had been published weekly in Fond du Lac’s local newspaper. Pier hoped to use this public attention to gain stature and recognition for a future in politics. He did not have the military background of a Charles Smith Hamilton, and he used the war effort as a means to develop name recognition and popularity among Fond du Lac County residents, many of whom served with him during the war. This was a common tactic among officers in the Civil War era, many of whom were political appointees without previous military experience. Of course the vast expansion of military forces during the war made it a certainty that amateurs would find themselves in positions of command. Nevertheless, there is no doubt that Colwert Pier grew to be a trustworthy soldier and an effective regimental leader, and he devoted more than a year of his life to help preserve the Union, including participation in the Battle of Cold Harbor and the Siege of Petersburg. Evidence of Pier’s bravery in ferocious fighting is depicted in one of his recollections:

Before Petersburg we shot days and worked nights; it was dangerous to be safe anywhere, as the opposing lines were within a stones-throw of each other; the rebels shot to kill and killed by the thousands. We returned their compliments and probably threw two pounds of lead and iron to their one.³¹

After three long years of fighting, the war was still not over, and enthusiasm for it had dwindled. The realization that the war was dangerous and more hardship than adventure weakened eagerness for enlistment. In order to keep the Union Army supplied with troops, volunteerism was stimulated, first with cash bounties, and later by conscription—the “draft.” Federal and state governments offered increasing “bounties” to encourage voluntary enlistment. The government aggressively sought new troops, and

³⁰ James Birney Palmer, *Civil War Letters*, (Fond du Lac County Historical Society, 1960).

³¹ William Love, *Wisconsin in the War of Rebellion*, (Madison: Church & Goodman, 1866), cited in Hamacher.

the incentive was no longer patriotism; it was money. In order to boost the number of volunteers, the Fond du Lac community held volunteer auctions to encourage men to enlist. At these auctions a local resident would call out “I will give \$50 for the next volunteer.” The next man would shout out “I will give \$100,” and so on until another volunteer accepted. These auctions would go on late into the night.³²

These bounties were offers of hundreds of dollars to any man or boy who would enlist. Since the draft included no bounty, many men volunteered before they were drafted and collected a \$302 bounty.³³ The initial phase of enthusiasm faded and gave way to a grim determination to prevail in some cases. Others decided the war was not for them and found ways to evade service by purchasing a substitute or by fleeing the country. Few reacted positively to the draft.

The Fond du Lac community’s initial response to the announcement of conscription was an example of a small town reacting to national events. In New York City, riots broke out over news of the draft. Fond du Lac saw no riots, but there was some consternation after a local newspaper declared that the United States government did not have the entitlement to “tear men from their homes to be butchered for the tyrants at Washington.” Many in Fond du Lac initially had a misapprehension as to what conscription actually was. Some Fond du Lac residents anticipated “a squad of armed soldiers . . . [would] appear at their doors with handcuffs and chains to take all the male inmates at all hazards.” Once this misunderstanding was rectified, the nervousness amongst the county’s citizens dwindled.³⁴ However, even with a better understanding, many citizens were still reluctant to be forced to fight.

After the draft had been ordered, some local men fled the country. Those who had been summoned might receive abrupt word that a “good friend” in Canada was ill or needed aid. “Twenty who thus suddenly learned of illness among their Canada friends left Fond du Lac in a single night.”³⁵ On the Sunday preceding the draft notice, one Fond du Lac paper declared “More than one-half of the men drafted in Eldorado on Wednesday

³² McKenna, 150.

³³ McKenna, 151.

³⁴ McKenna, 153.

³⁶ McKenna, 154

have run away.”³⁶ This behavior was a dramatic change from the heady patriotism and enthusiasm of the outbreak of the war.

Many women also became disheartened as they began to face the realities of the war. They concentrated their attention on their families, their personal needs and expressed anxiety over possible loss of a loved one. A yearning to have their sons and husbands back home supplanted the patriotism that they had previously endorsed. In fact, Fond du Lac’s early excesses of patriotism largely disappeared. Instead, the focus was on “just come home; we’re probably going to lose this war, but whether we win or lose, it’s not worth this tremendous cost of lives and destruction.”³⁷

A full accounting of war-related deaths of Fond du Lac County men during the Civil War has never been authoritatively compiled. However, given the number of wounded, sick, blind, limbless and diseased who were reported in the local newspaper, it is not surprising that enthusiasm for the war effort greatly subsided. This toll in lives, lost or altered led Fond du Lac to its third phase of responses, that of dealing with the consequences. Although Fond du Lac people had once been very supportive of the war, times were hard; families struggled to get by without their men. Hard times also contributed to more heartbreak, as the bounty for enlistment tempted men who needed money for their families. A typical Fond du Lac man who enlisted received a \$302 government bounty, and this did help overcome some financial burdens while the enlistee was away at war; however, the consequent shortage of men to run farms and operate machinery in the local mills still had a negative impact on families and community.³⁸

Changing war aims may also have altered the attitude of people in Fond du Lac toward the war. Although Fond du Lac had fully supported maintaining the Union, support for an end to slavery was less certain. Some Fond du Lac residents, including Edward Bragg, were vocally hostile toward Blacks and readily expressed racist attitudes.³⁹ Fond du Lac citizens were forced to deal directly with their attitudes toward Blacks when a group of former slaves, or contrabands, arrived in town as refugees in

³⁶ Brian Lamb, *Booksnotes: Stories from American History*, (New York: Public Affairs Publishing, 2001), 91.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ McKenna, 150.

³⁹ Herdegen, 61.

1863. Perhaps the most notable of them was Frances Harris, later Frances Shirley, born in Franklin County, Alabama, who left behind an oral history account of her experiences. She was a slave on a plantation until she was smuggled out of Southern-controlled territory. She came to Fond du Lac with her mother and several other Blacks through the intervention and influence of a local minister who sought to aid the displaced slaves whom he encountered living in appalling conditions at a refugee camp in Cairo, Illinois. The “contrabands,” as they were called, were presented to the Fond du Lac community as a way to cope with the wartime shortage of labor, but the people of Fond du Lac, according to Sally Albertz’ article “Fond du Lac’s Black Community and Their Church,” never accepted the presence of this Black population.⁴⁰

Perhaps all people in Fond du Lac County did not share the prevalent negative opinions of the new residents. A different perception is provided by Ruth Ewerdt, formally Ruth Kutz, who grew up on Morris Street in Fond du Lac, a block away from where Mrs. Shirley lived. Mrs. Ewerdt recalls as a young girl walking to school with “Grandma Shirley’s grandson, Howe, who was a dear playmate.” “Our neighborhood seemed to welcome and accept the Black community,” according to Mrs. Ewerdt. “I even recall some of the mothers in our neighborhood who would call upon elderly Black women if their white children were sick; they always had a good cure for whatever the illness was.” Mrs. Ewerdt recalls attending a funeral with her mother and sister Anita in the white church on stilts that was the center of the Black community. “That funeral very well could have been for Grandma Shirley’s husband.”⁴¹

The issue of race was not as strong in Fond du Lac as it was elsewhere, for few people had much first hand experience of Black individuals. According to Lance Herdegen in his book *The Men Stood Like Iron*, Wisconsinites who were serving in the Union Army placed more emphasis on enthusiasm for the war effort than on judging racial and class differences. Mickey Sullivan of the 6th Wisconsin, recollected a Black man, a barber from Fond du Lac, who followed the regiment and who was “well

⁴⁰ Sally Albertz “Fond du Lac’s Black Community and Their Church 1865-1943,” in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*. (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 33-54.

⁴¹ Ruth (Kutz) Ewerdt interview, April 10, 2004.

known.”⁴² Black soldiers, however, were segregated from whites, except that Black regiments had white officers.

Letters home constituted an important aspect of interaction between soldiers and their home communities that provided immediate information about the human cost of the conflict. Throughout the Civil War soldiers wrote an astonishing number of letters. Many also kept diaries. Letters of the time were not subject to censorship. Consequently, a good place to discover these men’s opinions of the war is to look at their letters. Some letters spoke of purposeful sacrifice and articulated what men really thought they were fighting for.⁴³ Others were more mundane or focused on personal concerns.

John Burhyte Corey of Empire Township in Fond du Lac County was enrolled as a Private in Company A of the 21st Regiment of Wisconsin Volunteers at Fond du Lac on August 15, 1862. He was mustered into the military of the United States at Camp Bragg for three years on September 5, 1862. Taken prisoner at Jefferson, Tennessee on December 28, 1862, he died of pneumonia in Libby Prison, Richmond, Virginia, on February 3, 1863. Corey wrote the following letter to his wife Hannah in 1862.⁴⁴

Camp 4 miles south of Bowling Green Nov the 9 1862

Dear Hannah, in my letter of yesterday I promised to rite [sic] you. I had time again before I left this place and so I shall leave to do so now and be up and ready to march by 11 o’clock 4-mile north of Bowling Green....

My health is better then [sic] it has been in four weeks. I think if I do not get any colder, I shall soon be as strong as ever. I wish you could send me some drawmy of tea...? and a Whiller? In your letters, send me more stamps a few at a time but no more paper until I let you know I want it.

Good night Dear Hannah.⁴⁵

Another soldier, James Malthouse, enlisted in the 36th Wisconsin Infantry on February 18, 1864, one of the three new Wisconsin units formed at the same time that Colwert Pier received his command. Malthouse was the Captain of Company G and was referred to as “the Capt.”⁴⁶ Malthouse had been employed as a quarry worker and had

⁴² Herdegen, 60-61.

⁴³ Lamb, 80.

⁴⁴ <http://www.rootsweb.com/~wifonddu.resource/scrapbook/corey.html>

⁴⁵ <http://www.rootsweb.com/~wifonddu.resource/scrapbook/corey.html> Spelling, grammar, and punctuation are as in the original.

⁴⁶ Richard E. Malthouse, “Letters From a Wisconsin Union Soldier: 36th Wisconsin Volunteers Company G.” Typescript dated 2002. Fond du Lac Public Library.

⁴⁹ Malthouse, 208.

farmed with his three sons for twelve years in Fond du Lac prior to enlisting in the Union Army.⁴⁷

Malthouse wrote to his wife and children while he was stationed in Washington D.C. His daughter collected the series of letters. The letter reproduced here depicts a sense of the emotion he was feeling about his family. He does not discuss his own safety or health in the letter, apart from the phrase “as long as you know that I am well,” a condition that he hopes will always be the case.

Virginia June 28, 1864

My Dear Wife and Children and Cousins

Thinking that you would like to hear from me at any time and I having a few moments to spare and as I can assure you that my heart is with you though I am absent in body and the most pleasure that I have while I have to be parted from you is in writing to you or to get a letter from you or do not think I should ever think as much about you when I should from you but such is the fact. You and my Dear Children are always in my mind either when I am in battle or when I am in the rear but I must not let my mind dwell upon those thoughts, as you will want to hear something else. You must keep up on your spirits and not get to fretting about me so long as you know that I am well for I know that if you fret much you will soon make yourself sick and for me to hear the news of you been sick would give me a great many sorrowful hours but I hope to be always able to hear or to read a letter from you at all times saying that you are well and I hope that I can always write the same to you. No more at this time. From Your Affectionate and Loving Husband and Father.

James Malthouse Co. G 36 Regt. Wis Vol. Second Army Corps
via Washington D.C.⁴⁸

Such letters depict the immediate thoughts and concerns of the men. The two presented here illustrate a range of issues. Both are written by Fond du Lac men, one an enlisted man, the other an officer, and both died during the Civil War. Each had its own specific flavor. Corey’s missive is more prosaic. His concern was primarily for himself, and the purpose of writing was to request needed items. There was no deep expression of support and affection for his wife, perhaps a consequence of a limited education that

⁵⁰ Malthouse, 235.

made it harder for him to express his feelings. Malthouse's letter, on the other hand, displays a sense of devotion to his wife and children back home that is typical of the sentiments of the Victorian era. From such letters one can gain a sense of individuals trying to remain healthy and strong while the war dragged on and they were apart from their families.

In the first year of the War, Fond du Lac's social life went on, despite the absence of men who were fighting. Community meetings were held featuring patriotic speeches, songs and music. Money was also raised for families whose husbands and sons were fighting in the Union Army and who were in consequence struggling to make ends meet. James Malthouse's family, for example, benefited from this benevolence. To address this problem on a more general scale, when the Hibernian Guards of Fond du Lac departed in 1861, the community provided for the families of the volunteers by raising \$4,000.⁴⁹ Examples such as these suggest that the Fond du Lac community during the Civil War was devoted to supporting military families.

Local women in Fond du Lac took a major role in home front Civil War efforts.⁵⁰ Such activities showed their support for their country and helped to keep their minds off their husbands and sons on the battlefield. Quilting bees were commonplace in Civil War Fond du Lac. Gatherings of women and young girls made quilts that were shipped to Union posts. When social activities were unavailable, evenings might consist of discussions around the fireplace with Bible readings for support and comfort. Candles burned late into the night as tired fingers worked swiftly and endlessly to make socks, mittens, and scarves for Union soldiers. A sense of unity is suggested as Fond du Lac came together with one goal: to give whatever support they could muster.⁵¹ James Palmer, a resident of Fond du Lac serving in the Union Army, provided a note of gratitude for such assistance: "Tell Grand Mother that shirt and socks she sent were very nice, very nice indeed. They will not come amiss. God grant that the time may come when I can repay her for the many kind favors I have received at her hands. Does she get

⁴⁹ "Great War Meeting Held in Amory Hall," *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, April 21, 1861.

⁵⁰ "Soldiers' Home," *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, March 29, 1865.

⁵¹ Ethel Alice Hurn, *Wisconsin Women in the War*, (Democrat Printing Company, 1911), 37.

her bounty money regularly both county and State? Tell her not to be afraid to use my allotment if she needs it, and finally not to despair.⁵²

Another newspaper article describes a meeting of Fond du Lac women from different church denominations who met at the Lewis House to organize a society to collect funds and to solicit donations to aid in building a soldier's home for Wisconsin veterans. Local businesses donated supplies as well.⁵³ The community came together with a desire to cope with the consequences of war.

Women were not alone in efforts of post-war rebuilding in Fond du Lac. Local area schoolchildren were involved in raising funds to build the Soldier's Home in Fond du Lac for returning disabled veterans. Many children got odd jobs such as clipping grass, delivering newspapers, and laboring as farm hands to help raise money for the new building. Parents and teachers greatly applauded the work of these children, and the community as a whole pulled together for the effort to cope with those whom the war had damaged.⁵⁶

The Fond du Lac community rejoiced when they received the news that General Lee had surrendered at Appamatox Court House. An article in the *Weekly Commonwealth* describes the preparations being made for a celebration. General Hamilton was the leading local official at this event. Hamilton had helped organize Fond du Lac's citizen soldiers and now he prepared to welcome the returning veterans.⁵⁴ The celebration began with a national salute, fired at noon. All the bells in the city joyfully rang for an hour. The men were ushered through Fond du Lac from the depot to Music Hall in downtown Fond du Lac, where a reception was given in their honor. Mayor James Taylor was there to welcome them. The entire community was in an uproar as husbands and wives, mothers and sons, and fathers and daughters were reunited. A procession and bonfire in Lakeside Park concluded the day's events.⁵⁵

Conceivably, the foremost event in the development of American identity was the Civil War. A sincere desire to preserve the unity of the country instilled nationalism in

⁵² Palmer, 20.

⁵³ "The Ladies Soldiers Relief Society Met at the Court House," *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, March 26, 1862.

⁵⁴ "Rumor Came Friday that Lee has Surrendered," *Fond du Lac Weekly Commonwealth*, April 12, 1865.

⁵⁵ "The Fourteenth Regiment Returned Home," *Fond du Lac Reporter*, October 28, 1865.

the hearts of its citizens. As veterans matured, they reinterpreted their experience in terms of national glory, and this was reflected in Fond du Lac's efforts to memorialize the War. Reunions of veterans were held, including at least one in Fond du Lac sponsored by the Grand Army of the Republic. Nationalism and civic pride expressed by veterans in Fond du Lac led to the construction of two Civil War monuments in the city early in the 20th century. The men who had fought and served in the Civil War had become prominent figures in Fond du Lac by the early 1900s. With financial help from the county a Union Soldier's Monument was planned for Veteran's Park in the center of Fond du Lac. This monument was erected to memorialize several organizations and battles that were Union victories in which men from Fond du Lac had fought.

The most significant stimulus for the project came from Mark Harrison, a local artist and businessman who made a commercial success from his art. In his will, Harrison bequeathed \$500 for the construction of the Civil War monument, a sum that covered about a quarter of the cost of the project. The statue that resulted still stands in the heart of Fond du Lac as a continuing remembrance of Fond du Lac's participation in the Civil War. Fond du Lac's involvement was also commemorated through oil paintings executed by Harrison, who crafted several representations of Fond du Lac's participation in the Civil War. One example, captioned "Soldiers March in formation on Fond du Lac's Main Street," can be seen in Michael Mentzer's book, *Fond du Lac County: A Gift of the Glacier*.⁵⁶

There were controversies surrounding the first statue, and it did not meet community expectations. Objections raised by local veterans' organizations led to another Civil War veterans' monument being erected in Rienzi Cemetery in 1907. This second statue was commissioned by the local G.A.R (Grand Army of the Republic) chapter itself. Sculpted exclusively from stone, it was perceived by many local residents

⁵⁶ Mentzer, 48-49. On the Veteran's Park monument, see Ann Martin, "Tin Soldier: Fond du Lac's Courthouse Square Union Soldiers Monument," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 110-126. On Harrison's career, see Sonja Bochen, "Art and Commerce in Fond du Lac: Mark Robert Harrison, 1819-1894," in Clarence B. Davis, ed., *Source of the Lake: 150 Years of History in Fond du Lac*, (Fond du Lac: Action Printing, 2002), 199-218.

to be less flamboyant and elaborate in ornamentation than the earlier Civil War monument.

These monuments, paintings, and the speeches that were given at reunions all celebrated participation in the Civil War as the expression of a heroic nationalism in which war veterans were glorified and honored for their sacrifices. Yet the privations of the community at large and the reluctance of many to serve were gradually forgotten.

Generations have passed since the conflict ended, but the Civil War is still a powerful presence in Fond du Lac. Residents still rejoice in the pride, strength and courage of the men, women and children who gave of themselves to strengthen a community torn by war, and in this they are only a small part of a national trend. Hundreds of Civil War Round Tables and Lincoln Associations flourish around the country. Half a dozen popular and professional history magazines continue to record every aspect of the war. Hundreds of books are published on the subject each year. More than 50,000 titles on the subject make the Civil War by a large margin the most written-about event in American History.⁵⁷

What was once a very real experience has also been transformed into a hobbyist's pastime. Fond du Lac's most celebrated recent encounter with its Civil War past, the depictions of Civil War battles held annually at the Wade House in Greenbush, Sheboygan County, represent a new and different approach. Each September, Fond du Lac and the surrounding communities celebrate the Civil War conflict with a "reenactment" of a typical engagement. The presentation is carried out by groups of men and women from many states whose hobby is to learn about the Civil War and try to interpret the historical era in order to inform and depict the reality of the conflict. The volunteers who take part in the reenactment place much emphasis on accuracy in representing the detail of uniforms, weapons and everyday military life of the period. Other reenactments, less extensive than the one in Greenbush, are held at the Fond du Lac Historical Society Galloway House and Village complex. Teaching "living history" of

⁵⁷ McPherson, ix.

this sort is popular both for the participants and for the many people who come to observe the pageant presented for them.

Although the Civil War took place a century and a half ago, it is still emphasized to Fond du Lac's youth in local schools. To take only one example, Kevin Braatz, a Social Studies teacher at Theisen Junior High School in Fond du Lac, spends up to five weeks studying the Civil War with his students each year.⁵⁸ Mr Braatz' main focus is the events leading up to the War but he also considers the social effects of the conflict and its consequences for the present day. He includes a discussion of the medical practices during the time, including bleeding of soldiers as a cure for disease and methods of amputations that were used to prevent infection and save lives. Notable for its lack of emphasis on battles, Braatz's approach illustrates a more analytical and dispassionate approach to the Civil War that is similar to the annual reenactment, where the Confederates "win" the battle one day and the Union the next, and is very different from the emotion-driven and immediate quality of many earlier responses.

Fond du Lac has experienced five distinct responses to the American Civil War. These responses reflected different understandings of the Civil War by those who experienced the war directly, those who remained at home during the confrontation, and those who only know of it as history. The Civil War lives on as Fond du Lac remembers those who fought in it and died and those who survived. All the veterans who fought and the families who experienced the Civil War have now been laid to rest, but their memory remains encapsulated in the community's historic experience.

⁵⁸ Kevin Braatz interview, April 14, 2004.

*Members of Company E, 2nd Wisconsin Infantry
Ft. Sam Houston, Texas, 1916*

Fond du Lac's Machinegunners: Company E in the First World War

Jody Schmitz

“Please will you let me see them go by, begged an old lady as she sought to elbow her way through the ranks of the spectators.” She stated, “I’ve got a grandson who is going.’ Instantly men and women stepped aside and gave the boy’s grandmother a front position.” Many people in the crowd were affected by this display. “One man wiped a trace of tears from his eyes as the old lady feebly waved her handkerchief to an all soldierly looking lad who smiled back at her.”¹

Such was the scene in Fond du Lac on August 7, 1917 as the town prepared to say goodbye to Company E, the first contingent of troops to be furnished by the city to join America’s Armed Forces in World War I. This National Guard Company of 150 men had no idea of the seriousness of the difficulties or of the danger that they were to face during their time overseas. Company E, given the designation the “Pride of Fond du Lac,” had a long road ahead of them. They were incorporated into the prestigious Rainbow Division, whose chief of staff, Douglas MacArthur, became one of the most famous leaders of World War II. They were given many chances to prove their bravery and skill in combat, and they were also the company that had the unfortunate distinction of suffering more casualties in the First World War than any other company from Wisconsin.²

The success and patriotism displayed by Company E came as a surprise to many people who were not from Wisconsin for World War I lacked the decisive blow or dramatic event, such as the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor that brought the United States into World War II, to rally the nation behind President Woodrow Wilson’s 1917

¹ *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*, August 8, 1917.

² The 150th Machine Gun Battalion “Roll of Honor,” an admittedly incomplete internet compilation of deaths in the unit, lists 87 members of the unit’s four companies as having been killed in action or died from wounds or disease. Of these individuals, 26 were members of company E. Company D (previously Company I, 4th Pennsylvania Infantry), a Reading Pennsylvania National Guard unit reassigned from the 149th Machine Gun Battalion to the 150th on March 16, 1918, also suffered 26 deaths. Company F (Oshkosh) lost 17 members, and Company G (Appleton) had 16 killed in action or died of wounds or disease. Statistics on members of the unit who were wounded are not available. See <http://www.d-2-128.org/history/ww1/150mgbn>

declaration of war, and the approach to war had been filled with controversy and debate.³ Until 1917, Wilson had sought to maintain American neutrality in the conflict. Indeed, during 1916, Wilson had campaigned and was elected on a platform of “strict neutrality,” that is, he declared that the United States would be neutral in fact as well as in name. Wilson’s policy was reflected in his campaign slogan: “He kept us out of war.” Even after a German submarine torpedoed the British liner *Lusitania* in 1915, killing 128 Americans, Wilson still tried to maintain neutrality in the conflict for the United States.

After the British intercepted and turned over to the United States government a German message to Mexico, known as the Zimmermann Telegram, in which Germany had approached Mexico suggesting an alliance that could lead to return of the lands that Mexico had lost to the United States in the Mexican War, relations between Germany and the United States were severed.⁴ The German declaration of unrestricted submarine warfare in January 1917 capped the shift in U.S. policy. Most Americans had few doubts about the course of action to take. On April 2, 1917, Wilson read a message before Congress, saying, “The world must be made safe for democracy.” On April 6, the United States Congress declared war on Germany.

In Wisconsin, however, people were less than enthusiastic about the war. In 1914, Wisconsin’s population was largely of German heritage. Along with German-Americans elsewhere, those living in Wisconsin received a shock when the United States entered the war. Many German-Americans across the nation had opposed entering the fighting, and they had preserved their cultural background through German-language newspapers that gave a different view of the war than the more pro-Allied English language press of the East coast. Many Wisconsin residents retained contacts with their ancestral home, and many knew the German language as well or better than English. Suddenly, the declaration of war brought suspicion of all things German. A sort of anti-German mania swept the country. The American Defense Society produced a notice stating that every person with a German name, “Unless known by years of Association to be absolutely loyal, should be treated as a potential spy.” So, while most German-Americans did not

³ Robert Carrington Nesbit and William F. Thompson, *Wisconsin: A History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2nd Edition, 1990), 441.

⁴ See Barbara Tuchman, *The Zimmermann Telegram*, (New York: Ballantine Books, 1966).

want to renounce their German heritage, regardless of their personal feelings about Kaiser Wilhelm II and the war, they realized that if they didn't conceal their German ties from rabid super-patriots, they opened themselves up to charges that "they were Huns as bad as the Kaiser and his armies."⁵

According to Wisconsin historian Robert Nesbit, Wisconsin was perceived as a hotbed of what many people in the country considered "unpatriotic activity". President Wilson demanded that Congress lay out a series of specific actions that were to be considered disloyal conduct. Congress responded with the Espionage Act. Residents of Wisconsin were charged with 92 cases of disloyalty under the Espionage Act, a much higher number than the residents of any other state. The list of offenses included 35 instances of criticizing United States policy, 36 of praising Germany, 32 of saying it was "a rich man's war and a poor man's fight," 19 of criticizing the sale of war bonds, 17 of comments derogatory to the Allies, 15 of statements critical of drives for war charities, nine for negative remarks about wheatless and meatless days, and nine insults to the flag.⁶

Nesbit states that most of these "disloyal acts" were remarks that were overheard in a local tavern or in personal conversation. Penalties for such crimes ranged from large fines to long sentences to the Federal Penitentiary at Fort Leavenworth. An example of such a "crime" is the story of a Madison druggist. He was fined \$2000 when someone overheard him say that the Kaiser was a better friend to his people than was the United States government to its people.⁷

The main voice advocating neutrality in the nation was Robert M. La Follette, a United States Senator from Wisconsin and founder of the Progressive Party. La Follette's position was simple: He never strayed from Wilson's original position of strict neutrality. According to LaFollette, no dispute in Europe should be of enough concern to force Americans to enter the war.⁸ La Follette's opposition to the war came from his belief that war would only further enrich the wealthy monopolists and manufacturers. Other than La Follette, only five other United States Senators voted against the Declaration of War. In the House of Representatives, nine of Wisconsin's eleven congressmen also voted against

⁵ Richard Nelson Current, *Wisconsin, A Bicentennial History* (New York: Norton Publishing, 1977). 54-55.

⁶ Nesbit and Thompson, 498.

⁷ Nesbit and Thompson, 499.

entering the war. The Wisconsin congressional delegations's voting record was interpreted by many in the rest of the United States to mean that the people of the state were not patriotic or trustworthy.⁹

La Follette's vocal record of opposition, combined with Wisconsin's large German population, brought the state much unwanted attention at that time. The neighboring states of Illinois and Minnesota considered a boycott on all Wisconsin goods. A speaker at a war rally in the Eastern United States suggested that a Federal expedition be sent to rescue Americans interned in Wisconsin. Even the United States War Department expected to have to send troops into Wisconsin to keep the peace once war was declared. Hysteria over the possibility of domestic unrest was widespread.¹⁰

Thus, Wisconsin fell victim to the general war hysteria that pitted neighbor against neighbor. Many Wisconsin residents of German descent took the easy course; they joined the outcry against everything German.¹¹ Patriotic groups such as the Wisconsin Defense League and the Wisconsin Loyalty Legion were formed to help prove to the rest of the nation that Wisconsin was as loyal as any state in the Union.¹²

As a testament to Wisconsinites national loyalty and perhaps a sign of the prevalence of war hysteria, the City of Monroe held an interesting vote. On April 3, the day after Wilson asked Congress for a Declaration of War, the people of Monroe persuaded the City Council to include a special referendum on the election ballot. The question read, "Under existing conditions, do you favor a Declaration of War by Congress? The vote totals were 954 against, and 94 in favor of the war. Three days later, after war was declared, Monroe residents held a well-attended mass meeting and a parade to show their support of the war.¹³

⁸ Nesbit and Thompson, 442.

⁹ Larry Gara, *A Short History of Wisconsin* (Madison: State Historical Society of Wisconsin Press, 1962), 211-212.

¹⁰ Edwin J. Gross, "War Hysteria," in *The Badger State: A Documentary History of Wisconsin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing, 1979), 413-414.

¹¹ Nesbit and Thompson, 447.

¹² David H. Shannon, "Wisconsin in the War." *The Badger State: A documentary History of Wisconsin* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmanns Publishing, 1979), 356-357.

¹³ Shannon, 398.

This was not an isolated incident. In Sheboygan, ballots in both English and German were distributed in churches throughout the area asking, “Shall the United States enter the European War?” The counting was stopped at 4,112 against and only 17 in favor, because Congress had declared war.¹⁴

Given Wisconsin’s label of “disloyalty” and its elected representatives’ record of opposition to the war, many Americans would not have been surprised if Wisconsin had lagged in the war effort. This turned out not to be the case. Wisconsin was the first state to organize a “Little War Cabinet” that promoted wheatless and meatless days to conserve food, and Wisconsin farmers even upped their food production to supply the soldiers. Wisconsin oversubscribed every Liberty savings bond issue and was the first state to aid the dependents of soldiers.¹⁵ Wisconsin was the first state to organize a State Council of Defense. Upon inspection of the Council of Defense, journalist Ray Stannard Baker reported, “You have in Wisconsin the best organized and most efficient, the most constructive, the most far-seeing defense league of any of the states I have visit.”¹⁶

Once the war began, Wisconsin had tried to prove that it was as loyal as any other state in the Union. The people of Wisconsin had given when asked to supply money and food. But for all the State’s accomplishments and generosity, questions of how deep the loyalty ran still remained. What would happen when Wisconsin was called on to give more than money and food? Would the State, with its large German population, send soldiers to fight against a land and a people that held so many close ties to Wisconsinites? Were men from Wisconsin prepared to cross the ocean and battle the enemy?

The city of Fond du Lac considered itself to be patriotic. In the four Liberty Loan drives, Fond du Lac subscribed \$8,919,500, an amount that went beyond the state’s quota for the area. While this was quite an accomplishment, the real pride of Fond du Lac was in the men whom the city sent overseas to fight the war. From a population of 54,000, the county of Fond du Lac sent more than 3,500 men to answer the nation’s call. Of those 3,500 soldiers, more than 2,500 were young men from the city of Fond du Lac itself.¹⁷

¹⁴ Shannon, 398-399.

¹⁵ Shannon, 399.

¹⁶ Gara, 214. Ray Stannard Baker (1870-1946) was an investigative journalist who wrote for *McClure’s Magazine* and, after 1906, the *American Magazine*, which he played a role in founding.

¹⁷ *Fond du Lac’s Part in the World War*. Compiled by The Wisconsin News (Federal Printing Co.,

At the outbreak of the war, people in Fond du Lac thought that they had one of the best units in the Wisconsin National Guard, Company E.¹⁸ The Company received its call to active duty on August 6, 1917. On this morning, the one hundred and fifty-three men that made up the force, under the command of Captain Adelbert R. Brunet, First Lieutenant John Smith, and Second Lieutenant Henry Vogt, took their first steps in a journey that would take them into a foreign land and a foreign war.

On that August morning, the headlines in *The Daily Reporter* read, “Fond du Lac Militia on Way to Front.” The story reported, “The war has come to Fond du Lac.” Thousands of citizens lined Marr, Fifth, and Main Streets and Forest Avenue to watch as the company marched slowly to the Northwestern depot where they were to be taken by train to Camp Douglass, located just south of Tomah. Acting on the request of Mayor J. F. Hohensee, practically all of the city’s stores remained closed until 9:30 in order to allow the clerks to attend the farewell parade. *The Daily Reporter* described the emotions of that day vividly by commenting that; “The scene portrayed was one of the most solemn depicted in the history of the city. The realization of the seriousness of the present struggle seemed to dawn on many people for the first time.”

The Daily Reporter also described the farewell the members of E Company received from the city on that day.

Then came the boys of Company E. Led by Captain A[delbert]. R. Brunet, they marched erect and in perfect step. Their appearance was the signal for handclapping, hat waving, and tears on the part of the throngs of people who lined the streets. A group of men brought their climbing gear and held choice seats at the top of a telegraph pole as to be able to see the men board the train. A final handshake or caress and all was over. Many who did not have relatives on the train were so impressed by the scenes that tears welled to their eyes. The reaction of the city to bidding their sons good-bye was quite. There was not much cheering, not many tears – there are emotions too deep for either. And through it all, the members of Company E, demonstrated their soldierliness by the manner in which they conducted themselves in the face of the general depression. A few dashed tears from their eyes as they waved to their friends or said final good-byes. But the boys were brave and kept smiling through it all.

The train that left from the Northwestern Station on time that morning at exactly 9:00 a.m. carried Company E and was followed by trains from Marinette and Appleton

Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1921), 3-4.

bearing the National Guard companies from those cities. All were on their way to Camp Douglass, Wisconsin, to prepare to join the American Expeditionary Force France.¹⁹

Shortly after the arrival at the Badger mobilization camp, the three organizations were formally mustered into Federal service. Later that August, word was received from Washington that three Wisconsin Companies were to be formed into a machine gun battalion. This battalion was to be given the honor of being one of three such battalions in a National Guard unit to see service in France. Naturally, every command at Camp Douglass hoped that they would be one of the three companies to be designated, but the honor went to three companies from the Fox River Valley, Company E of Fond du Lac, Company F of Oshkosh, and Company G of Appleton.²⁰ On August 16, 1917 Companies E, F, and G. were formally detached from the 2nd Wisconsin Infantry and became the 150th Machine Gun Battalion.²¹ Each company had an authorized strength of one captain, two first lieutenants, three second lieutenants, and 172 enlisted men. The battalion was under the command of Major W.B. Hall, of Oconto, formerly a battalion commander in the 2nd Wisconsin.

Competition for the honor to be included in this National Guard division wasn't limited to the troops at Camp Douglass. Another competition developed among individual states that wanted to be the first to send their National Guard units to fight in Europe.²² The first National Guard Division to be sent overseas was the 26th "Yankee" Division, composed of soldiers from New England States. A second division was organized from National Guard units drawn from all over the country. The official reason given for organizing a division composed of units from 26 different states and the District of Columbia was to check the negative implications that might result from competition among state contingents of the guard and to minimize the impact the mobilization could have on any one state. Another advantage that was seen to accrue to a division created from units from 26 different states was that the War Department could select the

¹⁸ *Fond du Lac's Part in the World War*, 3.

¹⁹ Ivan Spears, "Wisconsin in the Rainbow Division," *The Milwaukee Sunday Sentinel*, April 27, 1919.

²⁰ Spears.

²¹ The companies were redesignated: Company G became Company A, E became B, and F became C. The battalion was attached to the 83rd infantry brigade of the 42nd division. The original designation "Company E" is used throughout this essay.

²² *History of the 42nd Infantry Division* www.grunts.net/42ndid.html.

commanders and the higher ranking officers of the division, whereas units from a single state would already possess their own commanders. Major Douglas MacArthur presented the plan to the Secretary of War; it was received positively, and it was swiftly approved.²³

The flamboyant MacArthur wanted to command the new division. After campaigning vigorously for the job, he was named the new Chief of Staff of the Division and was given the rank of Colonel. At a news conference later, Colonel MacArthur described the unit by saying, “The 42nd Division stretches like a Rainbow from one end of America to the other.” The comment caught the attention and interest of those present, and the 42nd Division had the nickname by which it is best known – the Rainbow Division.²⁴

Building the new American army that was to fight in France was a monumental task. The U.S. Army had no recent experience with large tactical units, and the War Department had only 213,557 troops available on April 6, 1917, including 80,446 National Guardsmen. The largest active unit was a regiment.²⁵ Initially, four divisions could be formed and shipped to France, including one, the 1st, composed of regulars with a leavening of wartime volunteers, one, the 2nd, largely made up of regular army soldiers with some United States Marines, and two National Guard divisions, the 26th (Yankee) and 42nd (Rainbow) Divisions.

The same problems that existed for the U.S. Army as a whole existed for each of the new divisions. The first commander of the Rainbow Division was Major General

²³ James J. Cooke, *The Rainbow Division in the Great War* (Westport: Praeger Publishers, 1994), 5-6. Unless otherwise noted, this description of the Rainbow Division’s movements is drawn from two sources. One is Walter B. Wolf’s *Brief Story of the Rainbow Division* (New York: Rand McNally Co., 1919). Wolf was a member of the Rainbow Division during World War I. He wrote his account at the suggestion of the Division Commander in order that it might be available to each member of the Division upon their return home. The book contains an overview of the Division’s movements throughout the war and many interesting and occasionally gruesome pictures, such as a battlefield strewn with dead soldiers and a German dispatch dog entangled in barbed wire. Because his book is written from the point of view of a returning soldier, and because his audience also was returning soldiers, it mixes facts with patriotic fervor. The second source is James Cooke’s book, a much more recent publication that is a more comprehensive and objective study of the Rainbow Division.

²⁴ *42nd Infantry Division* www.dmna.state.ny.us/arng/42ndiv/42patch.html

²⁵ Robert A. Doughty, Ira D. Gruber, *et al.*, *American Military History and the Evolution of Warfare in the Western World* (Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath and Co., 1996), 335.

William A. Mann.²⁶ In early August, Mann realized that creating a division of more than 28,000 men might be easy to do on paper, but it was another matter to form the unit and train it for battle. Within a month, the order went out to the various units that were to compose the Rainbow Division to move from their respective camps to Camp Mills, New York, where their training as a division would begin.²⁷ The division was constructed around four infantry regiments from New York, Ohio, Alabama, and Iowa. Units from other states provided additional infantry, machine gunners, trench mortars, artillerymen, ambulance drivers, field hospital workers, military police, engineers, signalmen, sanitary units, and ammunition transport and supply train troops.

Fond du Lac's Company E combined with Oshkosh's Company F and Appleton's Company G to form the 150th Machine Gun Battalion. As Wisconsin's contribution to the Rainbow Division, these troops were redesignated Companies A (Appleton), B (Fond du Lac's Company E), and C (Oshkosh). In early September, the soldiers from these three companies were told to pack their belongings; in preparation to leave Camp Douglass, Wisconsin and head to Camp Mills, where they were to join the Rainbow Division.²⁸ The train carrying Company C and the Battalion Headquarters departed from Camp Douglass on September 3, 1917, at 3:50 p.m., while an hour later the companies from Fond du Lac and Appleton departed on a second train.

The soldiers found Camp Mills windy, dusty, and cold. Upon arrival their arrival on September 5, the men of Company E learned that their training time at Camp Mills was to be short. General John J. Pershing wanted to get troops to France as soon as possible in order to show the world that America's commitment to the war effort was sincere.²⁹ By September 13, the last of the units comprising the division had arrived at Camp Mills.

The training the soldiers received at Camp Mills concentrated on three directives handed down from Colonel MacArthur. The first priority was to create discipline and

²⁶ Mann commanded the division from September 1917 to December 14, 1917. He was replaced by Major General Charles R. Menoher (December 14, 1917 to November 7, 1918) and Major General Charles D. Rhodes (November 7, 1918 to November 11, 1918).

²⁷ Cooke, 7.

²⁸ Spears.

²⁹ Walter B. Wolf, *Brief Story of the Rainbow Division* (New York: Rand McNally Co., 1919), 5.

unit cohesion. The second directive emphasized physical fitness, and the third was to “learn the school of the soldier,” which included lessons in drill, personal, hygiene, and maintenance of personal combat gear. This training was just the first component of what the men would learn in France. Once across the ocean, the men received more detailed training under French tutors with combat experience on the Western Front who could prepare them for fighting in the trenches.³⁰ The role of the machine gunners was to use their rapid-firing weapons to provide fire support for the infantry on both defense and offense.

Standard equipment for American machine gunners before the war was the Benet-Mercié machine gun of 1909, used against Pancho Villa in Mexico but so complex to load that it could not be operated at night.³¹ Other models adopted only after the American entry into the war included Vickers-Maxim and water-cooled .30 caliber Browning Model 1917 machine guns.³² Unfortunately, another weapon authorized for use was a French design, the Chauchat, “probably one of the crudest, most unreliable and cheaply made guns ever to come into service.”³³ At first, American troops in France were largely dependent on European weapons, and 37,864 of these inferior guns were purchased between December 1917 and April 1918, enough to equip eighteen divisions but in fact only enough for nine, because fully half of the weapons were useless and were thrown away by the troops upon issue as so much scrap metal. Later in the war, the United States manufactured large numbers of Vickers, Lewis and Browning medium and light machine guns and automatic rifles. Between July and September 1918, 27,270 of these weapons were produced each month, more than twice the production of France and nearly three times that of Britain. Unfortunately, these weapons did not arrive in Europe until the war was over, and the American units remained equipped with the inferior

³⁰ Cooke, 13 –15.

³¹ John Ellis, *The Social History of the Machine Gun* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Press, 1975), 76.

³² James M. Morris, *America's Armed Forces: A History* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1996), 182; Ellis, 74. See also Anthony Smith, *Machine Gun: The Story of the Men and the Weapon that Changed the Face of War* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2003), 264-5.

³³ F.W.A. Hobart, *Pictorial History of the Machine Gun*, quoted in Ellis, 40.

Chaucat.³⁴ No comments about satisfaction or dissatisfaction with their weapons found their way into letters home written by the men of Company E.

A typical day six-day week for the men of Company E while at Camp Mills began at 5:30 a.m. and ended at 4:30 p.m. Lights out for enlisted men was at 9:45 p.m. Initially, there was an effort to give the men Saturday night and part of Sunday off, but the sense of urgency to train the troops won out. By the end of September, the members of the Rainbow Division had been toughened each week by several ten-mile marches with full gear.³⁵

During the night of October 18, 1917, the 42nd Infantry Division left Camp Mills for ships berthed at Hoboken, New Jersey, New York City, and Montreal, Canada. Company E was assigned to the Hoboken dock. They left for France that night, while the troops sent to Montreal left October 31st, and the troops dispatched to New York left November 3rd. To reach the Hoboken dock, Company E first boarded a train for the outskirts of New York City. From there, the men were ferried to the Hoboken docks, where they quietly boarded the transport ships and stayed there until the sunset of that day.³⁶

Upon arrival on board ship at Hoboken, the soldiers of Company E were fed and given “safe arrival cards.” These cards were to be sent home to relatives after their arrival in France. The soldiers and their families were given no information about the troops’ location or their destination. Company E, together with the 150th Machine Gun Battalion, boarded the *S.S. Covington*. Once aboard, the soldiers were sent below deck and were only allowed back topside when they were no longer in sight of land. Once at sea, they rotated watches, looking for enemy torpedoes or submarines.³⁷

Along with the *S.S. Covington*, five other ships, the *S.S. President Lincoln*, the *S.S. President Grant*, the *S.S. Tendaron*, the *S.S. Pastoris*, and the *S.S. Mallory*, set sail

³⁴ Ellis, 40, 76. General Pershing refused to issue the Browning automatic rifle to troops until the war was almost over because he was afraid the Germans might capture one and copy the design.

³⁵ Cooke, 17.

³⁶ Wolf, 7.

³⁷ *The Hoboken Port of Embarkation Staging Area*. www.hempsteadplains.com/cmhobkn.htm.

that same morning. The convoy was escorted by the cruiser *U.S.S. Seattle* and two destroyers, and was later joined by a refitted captured German raider.³⁸

In a letter to his wife, dated October 29, Captain A. R. Brunet, still on board the ship, told of the trip across the Atlantic. “The trip has been a wonderful one across the ocean. It gets kind of tiresome toward the last. The company boys are in the best of health and surely have stood the trip fine. There has been none of the men sick, and in regards to myself I have stood it most wonderfully.”³⁹ He went on to describe what the men thought of the ships and what life is like on board the vessel,

It was a most wonderful sight to our men to see the large battleships.⁴⁰ The members of Company E had never seen such large transports. We have our work as usual to do each day. We drill three hours a day. The work on the battleships is just as we had on the campgrounds. We rise at 5:30 and retire at 10:30. I am very proud of my Company E men for being so brave and doing their work as they should.

Another, perhaps more realistic, description of the trip across came from M.V. Marrow, of North Fond du Lac, in a letter written home:

Had regular rough water, so rough that we could get only a sandwich and coffee. I laughed more than I have since I left home to see the men trying to stand up and eat. The boat would roll and one fellow would grab another and they would start slipping and would catch on every one they could reach. By the time they got across the mess hall there would be all the way from one to fifty, some would fall down and slide, and so on. About the time they would all be in a pile, the boat would roll the other way, and back they would come. I wasn't sea sick, but there were a large number who were very sick. One day it was so rough that the men could not set up the tables and gave us our regular meal in our mess kit. It was up to us to find a place to sit down. It was like a bunch of mad dogs when we got started for the mess hall.

³⁸ *The S.S. Covington* was torpedoed and sunk by a German Submarine on the return trip to the United States. *The S.S. President Grant* was forced by engine trouble in the Atlantic Ocean to return to the United States. The troops on this transport arrived by another ship at Liverpool and joined the rest of the 42nd Division. Wolf, 7.

³⁹ All the soldiers' letters home reproduced in this essay were originally printed in the *Fond du Lac Daily Reporter*. These clippings can be found collected together in three untitled scrapbooks at the Fond du Lac County Historical Society Adams House Collection. Unfortunately, the compiler neglected to record the dates of the newspapers from which the clippings were taken.

⁴⁰ There were no battleships escorting Company E's convoy. This error in Brunet's letter probably resulted from the men never having seen large ships before and therefore not being able to make the distinction between a battleship and a cruiser or a destroyer.

His feeling about the trip over were best summed up in the last line of his letter, “I don’t want to make any more trips across, after I once get home.”

The 42nd Division landed at St. Nazaire, France, November 1, 1917, having successfully completed the first phase of its war career. Some divisional units debarked at Brest, France, and Liverpool, England. Upon landing, the troops of the 42nd were sent into training in the Toul sector at Vaucoulers, in Lorraine, where the task was to turn the National Guard units into a unified divisional fighting machine.⁴¹

The men of Company E found themselves immersed in a foreign land and culture. Sergeant Leo Moquin wrote home to his family discussing the wonders of the French culture.

Probably you imagine that things are selling cheap here in French stores but please listen to what I have to say. They just about charge double the price to American soldiers. Candies, chocolates, and everything that contains sugar can’t be touched with a franc (20 cents) and it’s only with about five francs that you can get a smell or a look in.

Sergeant Moquin also noted that there were differences in terminology between the Americans and the French,

What the French people call a forest, we wouldn’t call a good sized grove in a farmer’s back yard. They always speak of going in the forest after firewood. I imagined at first that it was something large, but when I found that I could walk through in less than a half hour, I soon changed my mind.

And as for the French women Moquin wrote, “They can talk about the French girls, but they haven’t anything over the American girls, as much as I have seen of them.”

The men of Company E spent their time at Vaucoulers from November 1 to December 11 in relative comfort at, as indicated in a letter from Lloyd Roy. He wrote of the company, “I wish you could see our company now, for you would not recognize half of them, they are all so fat and healthy. My clothes are too small for me now. The work is easy, and we have lots of time to ourselves.” Soon, all this comfort would change as men faced the reality of the war.

⁴¹ Wolf, 7-8.

On December 11, the division received an unexpected order to move to La Fauche area. Upon arrival, the division received a warning order that they were to begin movement farther south to Rolampont beginning on December 26. By Christmas Day, France had received a great deal of snow. The hilly roads were glazed with ice, the wind was high, and the temperature was well below zero. The men's next march was to be a long one.⁴²

In retrospect, many of the members of the division considered this march to be one of the most trying and arduous events they experienced. The troops took four days to cover about eight miles. After their intense physical training at Camp Mills, this march should have presented no great problem for the Division; however, the circumstances in France made the march hellish. The men of Company E marched along with their division through blinding snowstorms, in the severe cold, on roads that were deep with snow. The men made this march in the same uniforms that they had been wearing since their arrival in France, but now these uniforms were showing signs of wear. There were many men without overcoats, and gloves were rare. Most of the soldiers were not equipped with proper boots or with wool socks.⁴³ In a letter to his wife, Captain A. R. Brunette relayed the condition of some of the men on the march.

Because of the condition of their shoes, the feet of some of the soldiers had grown so sore that they could not wear any at all. Instead they wrapped them in burlap and rags and marched on the sharp icy roads with their heavy packs. Their condition was unbelievable... There was not a sufficient number of ambulances to pick up the stragglers, and for days they wandered along the roads, trying to catch up with their outfits.

The march was summed up by one soldier, limping along with his feet in rags, slipping and sliding under the weight of his pack, who commented; "Valley Forge – Hell! There ain't no such animal."⁴⁴

The troops arrived at their new home, Rolampont, in January 20. In its new area, the division was spread out over a large territory consisting of small, scattered towns. This was to be the last stop before the division was moved up to the front line. The men

⁴² Wolf, 9-10.

⁴³ Wolf, 10.

⁴⁴ Wolf, 10.

worked with two battalions of the 32nd French regiment to prepare themselves for combat. They learned the basics of trench warfare and took grenade and range practice.⁴⁵

While the experienced French soldiers had a hand in training the Americans, it was Pershing's directive that Americans maintain control over the direction of the training. In instructions sent to the 42nd Division, Pershing state, "The training of American troops must remain in the hands of American officers. Neither the French officers furnished to your division nor the French battalion commanders will be permitted by you to dictate methods of training."⁴⁶

Here, some notice must be taken of the role censors played in the letters being sent home by the men of Company E and the Rainbow Division. After the arduous journey that they men had just completed, Sergeant Leo Moquin was only allowed to pass on minimal information to his family at home. He glossed over the whole experience by saying; "We've changed stations since I wrote you folks last. Our company is scattered all over the village on the sides of hills." All letters were forbidden to give away the location of the soldiers and were all marked "Somewhere in France." Moquin also acknowledged this in his letter saying that, "Your son is getting to be a real soldier 'somewhere in France'."

An even more extreme example of the censor's powers was in an excerpt from a letter written by another member of Company E, Ralph Bender. "The (censored) are worst of all, so the next time you are downtown buy a few pounds of (censored) and ship it over for it is impossible to get anything so as you can get rid of them over here."

As members of Company E prepared for their inevitable trip to the front, it was obvious that they were experiencing conflicting emotions. A letter written by Benjamin Gerred stated that, "We are satisfied to the man and are training hard as we know we have a man sized job ahead of us, and we will all be there and fit for the job to. We are all anxious to get in and get a few Fritzes." In the very next sentence of his letter, after showing just how eager his is to get a short at "the Kaiser," he made a statement that summarized how all the men must have felt, "I am like a baseball player on third base, thinking of nothing but home."

⁴⁵ Wolf, 11-12.

The soldiers had good reason to be homesick. Lieutenant Colonel D.D. Fairchild of the Medical Corps reported that over 80 percent of the men he saw had lice, and one-fourth of all the troops drilling had worn-out shoes, with rips and holes that let in the mud, wet, and cold. In response to Fairchild's report, a number of new policies were introduced. The soldiers were to receive a shower every four days and there was to be time set aside every day for hygiene and foot care.⁴⁷

Despite the harsh conditions they endured, the prevailing message, repeated over and over in the letters written by the men of Company E, was the sentiment that they wanted to get their shot at the Germans. Reginald Kilp, a member of Company E, wrote, "The old Co. E boys claim they are anxious to see how many 'Boche' they are capable of getting with their machine guns." Typically statements of this "go out and get them" attitude soon were followed with statements of how much the men miss Fond du Lac, the people there, and their families. Almost all the letters home end with the observation that, more than anything, the men wanted mail.

Hugh M. Flannagan, a Lieutenant with Company E, wrote home to his mother frequently. As a Lieutenant, it was often his job to censor the mail written by his men. He testifies to the troop's desire for letters from home:

There is something that runs through all of the letters [written by the men] and that is 'write often.' If there is one thing a soldiers enjoys more than getting mail, I don't know what it is. The majority of men are 18-22 years old, most have never been away from home before in their lives. They get lonely and homesick, they get that 'don't give a darn' in what happens in their looks and manner. It sure wonderful what a letter from home will do for these men.

While the members of Company E waited for their turn in the trenches, they had time to observe French life. As Reginald Kilp wrote,

There are many interesting sights and peculiarities of the French people, especially their ways of living. Wine is served with every meal. The women here are capable of doing work that some men in the states could not think of doing. This is the truth. Every morning you may see them traveling to town with a big basket strapped on their backs and later returning with it full of articles that are needed for existence.

⁴⁶ Cooke, 36.

⁴⁷ Cooke, 43-44.

The arrival of new uniforms and supplies signaled that the Rainbow infantry and the machine gunners would soon be on the front line. Rumors flew throughout Rolampont that the Americans would not occupy their own sector as Pershing wanted, but instead they would be divided between the British and the French.⁴⁸

The Rainbow Division, including Company E, was to move from its base in Rolampont to Luneville, approximately 100 miles away. The plan was to place one regiment with each division of the French VII Corps, then holding a sixteen-mile front. In a tremendous change of policy, American commanders were told that they would not be commanding their troops as originally ordered and emphasized by Pershing. The new order, issued February 15 by Major General Hunter Liggett stated:

The French commanders have been requested to require of you and your subordinates the actual preparation of order, but IN NO CASE will you or your brigade commanders give tactical orders or instructions DIRECT while serving with the French with whom rests in its entirety the responsibility for the tactical command.⁴⁹

This new order was issued for two reasons. One reason is obvious: the French had more than three years' experience fighting in the trenches. A second reason may have been that Pershing knew that men like MacArthur wanted a chance to prove themselves in combat as leaders, and ambition might interfere with judgment for untried leaders. For a regular army soldier, decoration could lead to promotion and to a higher command. For these reasons, command was left to the French.⁵⁰ But the order was clearly intended only to cover the period of initial training, for General Pershing consistently and fiercely resisted French and British proposals that his new army be utilized to reinforce existing French and British units in the line under their command. His view was that the new American Army must fight as a unit, under American commanders.⁵¹

For the troops, the shift to the more active sector of the Western Front near Luneville resulted in more basic concerns. They wondered what it would be like in the

⁴⁸ Cooke, 47.

⁴⁹ Cooke, 48.

⁵⁰ Cooke, 48.

⁵¹ Robert Leckie, *The Wars of America* (New York: HarperCollins, 1992), II, 637-8.

trenches, what it would be like to face the Germans, and whether they would come out of the fighting alive?

Nevertheless, for Company E and the rest of the Rainbow Division, their arrival in Luneville was a welcome change of pace from life in Rolampont. The men had free time in the evening. As Corporal Guy Gross wrote to his brother;

For the first time we took a regular, old-fashioned interest in life again. We went to picture shows and restaurants. Some of us promenaded dumbly up and down with French girls. Some of us became engaged, we encountered our first ladies of the night since landing in France, and some of us had an introduction to sex with a capital S.

Reginald Kilp also wrote home about life in Luneville; however, he had a more chaste version of a soldier's life in France that he relayed to his mother.

I have heard from different sources that the people in the states are worrying about the morals of the boys. I, myself, was under the impression when I was still in the states that France offered many temptations for the Sammies. This is not so now as the head of our army, General Pershing, has protected the boys from all these places. The American soldier can't get anything to drink except a light wine and beer, which is more like flavored water. Another thing he can't go into houses of ill fame. At all these places sentries are stationed to see that orders are enforced. The American soldier is subject to court martial if he disobeys these laws. The French people respect and fear the laws so they will not take any chances by breaking the orders. I firmly believe that Sammy is better morally in France than in the states.

One may only surmise which of these views more accurately reflected the reality of life for the American troops who had arrived in a foreign country for the first time and, for many of them, had their first taste of an unfamiliar culture.

On February 18, 1918, Company E was at last ordered to the front line where they would enter the trenches. Under the tutelage of four French divisions, the neophyte troops received careful and sound instruction in the details of their new life on 'the line' and in the trenches.⁵² Life in the trenches for the soldiers of the company was a revelation. In a letter to his brother, Private Charles Willet observed,

We are at present in the trenches and it sure is some place. It keeps you busy ducking around out of the way of shrapnel as it is flying all the time. We have a good place to sleep in, it is called a dug out and is from thirty to sixty feet under the ground with all modern improvements, even to running water. There are five

⁵² Wolf, 11.

of us in one hole and last night we were awakened by a loud noise. By the way, the rats over here are the size of a big cat at home. One of these fell into the water and that was what woke us up.

Another description of the way in which the men viewed their life in the trenches came from George Gerred. He wrote from 'Hotel de Dugout',

It is damp and cold here in the dugout and the sun is shining, so I guess I will hit [sic] for the trenches or 'No Man's Land'. Well, the Huns just started a bombardment, so I had to duck into the trenches. It is pretty unhandy writing here, but they will quit in a minute so I can crawl out back into the sun. Damn the Boches, won't even let a fellow write a letter, just tried to crawl out and a snipe [sic] took a shot at me. If I were to stand in one place ten minutes and let him snipe, the chances are I would not be any worse off than I am right now. They are certainly poor shots for being at it so long.

Gerred ends his letter with, "Well, don't worry, as there is not much more danger here than there would be in Fondy on one of those 'Lightless Nights'."

In general, life in the trenches was extremely unpleasant. A young lieutenant from the 83rd Brigade, of which Company E was a part, recalled his first day on the front line.

As French intelligence was examining the body of a dead German soldier to find documents and to confirm the dead man's unit for order of battle information, the young officer became so violently ill that he staggered back to the dugout where he was still overwhelmed by the smells of death, unwashed bodies, human excrement, rotting equipment, and spoiling food.⁵³

Soon, the men would learn that the trenches were not as safe as Fondy. Rumors had begun to circulate that by March 21, the 42nd Division would be out of the Luneville trenches and would be sent to another quiet area to evaluate its performance and to begin training for its next combat experience. Pershing had decided that, after one month of practice with the French, the Rainbow Division would be sent back to Rolampont. But the events of March 21 forced the General to change his decision.⁵⁴

Company E had the unfortunate distinction of being in the trenches on March 21, 1918, the date the Germans launched their major spring offensive designed to end the war. The collapse of Russia late in 1917 had permitted the Germans to shift a million soldiers from the Eastern Front to France, and this now gave the Germans numerical

⁵³ Cooke, 60.

⁵⁴ Wolf, 12.

superiority in that theater for the first time since 1914. General Ludendorff planned a rapid series of attacks that would use rapid bombardments, extensive employment of poison gas, and new infiltration tactics to break through the Allied lines drive the British back to the sea, capture Paris, and bring the war to an end before, he believed, the Americans could intervene effectively.⁵⁵

Every soldier was needed to stop the Germans, who had broken through the British lines, and this included the small number of American divisions that had arrived in France. For the first time, on March 21, although it fortunately was not in the path of the great German offensive, Company E was hit with a mustard gas attack. Favored by an ideal breeze blowing across the front, mustard and chlorine gas disabled entire units. Most of the Company E casualties resulted from exposure to the chemical agents.⁵⁶

Corporal T. Edward Sullivan related his first hand account of that gas attack.

On the evening of March 21st a detail[,] of which I was one, was dispatched to secure some equipment some distance from our quarters. The objective point was reached O.K. At that we could see the ill-fated country from our quarters. On our return enemy gas shells were heard falling to our rear[,] gradually they crept closer to us, until we were caught in the very midst of the dandiest barrage of gas shells and shrapnel you ever heard of. Sergt. [sic] Moquin and I took care of a wounded soldier, a member of another company, dressed his wounds the best we knew how in the growing darkness, while shells were exploding about us. It seemed as if they would curl themselves about your neck, in and out of your legs and then break right at your feet. The three of us were separated from the rest of the detail, every man for himself in a case like that. We had adjusted our gas masks when the gas was first noticed. How we prayed that we might be saved, all this time the shell fire continued after throwing up dirt over us. Our wounded companion, although his wound was a ragged tear just below the knee, was a plucky lad, never uttered one word of complaint, while we were carrying him and you can easily imagine how ruggedly that was. I gave him the cross that was attached to my rosary. After a time, about an hour and a half, the enemy tired of shelling our position. Sergeant [sic] Leo Moquin and I hurried our new friend into a passing ambulance on its way to a camp hospital. I have heard from time to time that he is doing fine.

Another account of the gas attack came from Corporal Guy Cross in a letter dated March 31.

⁵⁵ On the German offensive, see Barrie Pitt, *1918: The Last Act* (New York: W.W. Norton & Co., 1963).

⁵⁶ Wolf, 13.

I was gassed while at the front. At about 5:30 o'clock one night the first part of last week, the Germans started shelling us pretty heavy with gas shells, and kept it up continually until 9:00 o'clock. We wore our gas masks all through the bombardment, but as they are tiresome things to wear, we removed them shortly afterward. It had rained somewhat during the day and the ground was damp which has a great tendency to hold the gases. There were a couple of Frenchman in the dugout who said they didn't think there was enough gas to hurt anything, but it turned out they were badly mistaken, they were gassed too. We got orders about midnight to leave our positions which we did at once, moving about a mile away where we laid by the roadside until morning. I couldn't rest as my eyes were commenced to smart something fierce and by morning I was as blind as a bat and had to be led to the auto that took us to the hospital. I was unable to see at all for four days but can see almost as good as ever now, thanks to our Red Cross Nurses. My face and the lower part of my body is burned somewhat but is coming along dandy. About sixty of the boys of old Company E were gassed.

After spending a month in the trenches under French tutelage, Company E had learned several lessons. They learned how to live in a combat environment where everyday tasks were performed accompanied by the threat of death. They learned to trust each other, and they learned to help each other. That was the only way to survive in the trenches.⁵⁷ At the same time, they had not lost the enthusiasm and naive exuberance that made them so attractive to both the British and French as potential replacements for the depleted and cynical ranks of armies that had been fighting in the trenches for more than three years.⁵⁸

On March 23, the day after the gas attack that crippled Company E, along with other companies of the division, General MacArthur gave the order that the troops were to have four days to rest to clean their equipment and to prepare to move to the Baccarat Area.⁵⁹ Baccarat was considered to be a quiet sector, as had been Luneville, but the difference was that Baccarat was to be turned over to the Americans completely. No longer would the soldiers have the benefit of the experienced French soldiers to guide them. The men of Company E and the Rainbow Division would not receive the additional training that had originally been planned. The 42nd Division would not leave the line for anything, except for an occasional rest and refitting, until the end of the war.⁶⁰

⁵⁷ Cooke, 70.

⁵⁸ Leckie, 637-8, 649.

⁵⁹ Cooke, 70-71.

⁶⁰ Cooke, 71.

The march from Luneville to Baccarat was much easier on the men than the previous march from Rolampont to Luneville. They had only spring rains to deal with instead of the blustering cold and inadequate clothing of the previous December.⁶¹

The 42nd Division took over the sector of Baccarat on April 1, 1918, relieving the 128th French Division. From this point on, the employment of the 42nd Division was controlled by the developments on the Western Front. The German attack on March 21 had been powerful enough that the VIIth French Corps had to shift its strength elsewhere, forcing the 42nd to hold its own sector without French support earlier than had been planned.⁶²

By now the Rainbow Division, a typical double-strength American division, had been divided into two self-contained fighting units, the 83rd Brigade and the 84th Brigade. The 83rd Brigade, of which Company E was a part, was headquartered in the town of Merviller, while the 84th Brigade was headquartered in the town of Neufmaison.⁶³ The front covered by these two brigades was 16 kilometers long and had, except for the previous month, been quiet ever since the Germans had overrun it in the first hours of the war, only to be driven back by the French. It consisted of numerous small towns and villages, as well as the larger towns of Badonviller and Baccarat. The sector was considered the hinge for the entire Alsatian front, for if held by the Germans, the main line of supplies to Alsace would be cut off.⁶⁴

As the Rainbow Division got settled into the trenches at Baccarat, a system for rotation of troops was set up. The rotation was based on an eight-day cycle, with a full rotation of troops being completed every twenty-four days. This meant that Company E spent sixteen days buried in the trenches and then enjoyed eight days rest in the rear of the trenches. During their eight days in the rear, the soldiers were allowed to go into the local towns for a break from trench life. Most men used their leave to visit the city of Baccarat or the large town of Bardonviller. These towns had changed during the war. Once beautiful tourist towns, they now were overrun with cheap bars and prostitutes. While

⁶¹ Wolf, 14.

⁶² Wolf, 14-15.

⁶³ "Camp Mills Garden City Long Island." www.hemsteadplains.com/cm/cm/actv0.htm.

⁶⁴ Wolf, 15.

they were posted to the Baccarat Sector, venereal disease rates among the men increased, according to Wisconsin National Guard physician James Frew.⁶⁵

The men of Company E found time in their new home of Baccarat to digest all that had happened to them since they first entered the trenches in February. Lieutenant John Smith wrote a letter home dated April 3, 1918 that spoke volumes as to the mindset of the company.

We have only just come out of our first time in the trenches. Of course, we consider ourselves veterans now, but still realize that there is much to learn. It is a big game, and a man's game all of the way through. There is a heap of personal satisfaction in knowing that I have the stuff in me to go through with it. There is always a doubt in a fellow's mind just how he will act the first time in, and when he finds out that he isn't killed unless he is hit, and that it doesn't seem to make much difference anyway, it makes him feel pretty good to know that instead of dreading the next time he is actually looking forward to it. Nevertheless, they can stop this little old war any time that they want to as far as we are concerned, but the longer we stay the more we learn and the more we learn is going to make it just that much rougher for Bill [Kaiser Wilhelm] and that is just what we want. Unless he lies down like a yellow dog, he is going to get one grand trimming and I am glad that I am here to help do it.

Lester Ormsby, a bugler in the company also echoed the sentiment found in Lieutenant Smith's letter, about the company "looking forward to" being in the trenches.

We are not in the trenches at present but expect to be shortly. It is very common to go to the trenches now, as we are quite used to it. The first time we went in it was sort of hard for us, but since then everything is different. You may think I'm strange, but I tell you I would rather be in the trenches than out, but it is a fact and most of the boys feel the same about it. Of course, it is nice to be out of them for a short time to realize what life is, but you are always looking for the day when you will get back and give it to the enemy. The sooner we do that the sooner we will get back home where life is worth living.

Ormsby's letter also acknowledged that however they felt about life in the trenches, what these soldiers wanted more than anything else was to be at home with their families.

In the second part of his letter, Ormsby went on to describe 'No Man's Land,' what the soldiers called the land between Allied and German trenches.

From our front line trenches you can look across No Man's Land and see the barbed wire entanglements and the German Front lines. Believe me it does look fierce. The big American guns have blown everything to pieces in the German

⁶⁵ Cooke, 79.

lines. Where there were woods it is now all clear as though a knife had cut them down.

Private Lyle Harris also sent home an account of what it was like to look out from the trenches into this area.

Let me try to give you a little description of No Man's Land. Between the two trenches there is just about six hundred billion rolls of barbed wire while the ground looks as though someone had started to dig basements for houses or walls. There might be a tree or bush where the Germans do their sniping.

On a morning in early May, the Germans let loose another gas attack on Company E. This time they used a projector that hurled gas-filled bombs at the soldiers. The fumes from the bombs turned the leaves of the trees white. The gas barrage was so intense that when one landed near a soldier, the explosion blew his mask off, and he suffocated.⁶⁶

Lieutenant van Dolsen, a surgeon with the 83rd Brigade, later said that nothing in medical school or at Luneville had trained him to operate on wounded soldiers whose clothes and skin were so covered with gas that he had to wear a gas mask while operating. The Rainbow Division suffered many losses that day, nearly a hundred men who were killed outright from the projector assault.⁶⁷

Company E suffered a disproportionately high rate of loss in this attack. A letter from Private George Duwe addressed this loss of life.

I suppose when the news came to Fondy about our losses in the company that the people nearly went mad. Well we were in luck not to have more. The boys received a bunch of names in the papers listed as seriously wounded. They had a little hard luck, but we will have all of them back, except those whom the Lord has called.

And with all of the wisdom of a seasoned veteran of war, Duwe ended his letter with, "It is all in the game you know. As long as a fellow does right he has no reason to fear death."

As the Germans increased their gas attacks, it became vital for the Rainbow Division staff to do something to protect their men in the trenches. Once the soldiers left the first two lines of the trenches, they had a tendency not to wear their gas masks. To counter this action, the order was handed down that all members of the division must

⁶⁶ Wolf, 17-18.

⁶⁷ Cooke, 90.

carry their gas masks at all times, and that shaving was to be required everyday, except for a mustache, because facial hair prevented the mask from sealing tightly to the face. The soldiers of the Rainbow Division were required to deploy the masks in “alert position,” which meant that they hung from the neck and rested on the chest.⁶⁸

In June 1918 rumors began to fly that the 42nd Division was to be relieved by the 77th Division. By this time the situation on the sectors where the 42nd Division had operated since February, first at Luneville and then at Baccarat, had become quiet. The quiet proved to be a source of restlessness for soldiers of the Division, and many men hoped that they would be transferred to another front. Soon the men got their wish. After four months in the front lines, the longest unbroken period of time spent in the trenches by any American Division, the 42nd left the trenches of Baccarat to the 77th. Only two American Divisions spent more time in Europe than the Rainbow Division: the 1st Division, nicknamed the “Big Red One,” and the National Guard’s 26th, “Yankee” Division.⁶⁹ The time the troops spent at Baccarat had been long and trying, but as they marched toward a new battlefield they felt, according to General MacArthur, like “first-class combat troops.”⁷⁰

Company E accompanied the rest of the Rainbow Division in the movement from Baccarat to the Champagne front. The troops were able to make the four-day march through French country that was untouched by the war.⁷¹ It was June now, and Company E, along with the rest of the Rainbow Division, were experienced fighters.

The mission of the 42nd Division in Champagne was to be a defensive one. The French commander in charge was General Henri Gouraud, a one-armed general with a bushy beard. The Rainbow Division’s first impression of General Gouraud was not favorable. Upon hearing that his reinforcements had arrived in Champagne, Gouraud and his driver immediately left their headquarters and raced to the division’s position. Rounding a corner, Gouraud’s car hit something. Gouraud had found the Rainbow Division and had hit the first soldier that he came across. Gouraud was quoted as saying,

⁶⁸ Cooke, 90-91.

⁶⁹ Cooke, 97.

⁷⁰ Cooke, 93.

⁷¹ Wolf, 19.

after the incident, “This is a fine kettle of fish. General Pershing assigns me to the Rainbow Division for reinforcements, and voilà, the first man to fall is knocked senseless by my own automobile.”⁷² Despite his first meeting with the soldiers of the 42nd, Gouraud and the American troops took a liking to each other. The Rainbow Division was the only American division to fight in General Gouraud’s army.⁷³

The Rainbow Division expected to remain on the defensive in Champagne. Gouraud believed that the Germans would strike Champagne, with their primary objective the city of Chalons. Once Chalon was taken, the Germans could then launch a full-scale attack toward the city of Paris. Gouraud told MacArthur that he had no intention of allowing this, even if every French soldier and American soldier under his command perished.⁷⁴

Gouraud assigned the Rainbow Division to the 21st Army Corps under General Pierre Naulin. Gouraud’s battle plan called for the front line trenches to be abandoned, except for a few platoons of French soldiers who would stay to deceive the Germans into believing that the trenches were occupied. This trench was known as the sacrificial trench. The Germans would then fire their first artillery shells into the nearly empty trenches. As the Germans advanced beyond the sacrificial trench, they would pass through a minefield and razor wire and into the first line of trenches, where infantry supported by artillery would be waiting. Behind the sacrificial trench and the first trench was the second trench, and that was where the Rainbow Division was stationed.⁷⁵

The 42nd had its own battle plan for holding their area. The two brigades, with the 83rd to the left and the 84th to the right, each held equal sections of ground. Company E as part of the 83rd brigade and the 150th machine gun battalion, had a tremendously important part to play in the defense. Their orders were to support three battalions, the 2nd and 3rd Battalions of the 165th and the 3rd Battalion of Ohio’s 166th, with machine gun fire.⁷⁶

⁷² Cooke, 98.

⁷³ Wolf, 19.

⁷⁴ Cooke, 101.

⁷⁵ Cooke, 102-104.

⁷⁶ Cooke, 104.

As the armies waited for the German attack, General Gouraud's orders were simple, as seen in his July 7th address to the French and American soldiers:

We may be attacked at any moment. You all know that a defensive battle was never engaged under more favorable conditions. We are awake and on our guard. You will fight on a terrain that you have transformed by your work and your perseverance into a redoubtable fortress. The bombardment will be terrible. You will stand without weakness. The assault will be fierce, in a cloud of smoke, dust and gas. But your positions and your armament are formidable. In your breasts beat the brave and strong hearts of free men. None shall look to the rear; none shall yield a step. Each shall have but on thought: to kill a-plenty, until they have had their fill. Therefore, your General says to you: You will break this assault and it will be a happy day.⁷⁷

For an entire week, the suspense of the impending attack continued. Finally, on July 14th, the Rainbow Division, including Company E, received the telephone call with the signal FRANÇOIS 570. This signal meant that a general German attack on a wide front was expected to begin, and all troops were ordered to take their battle stations. The alert went out, and the soldiers prepared for the fight. Members of Company E checked their guns and their ammunition again to make sure that, when the assault came, they would be ready.⁷⁸

A few minutes after midnight on July 15th, the Germans attacked. They let loose explosives and gas, but, luckily, most of it fell into the lightly-held sacrificial trench, just as planned.⁷⁹ The bombardment lasted until dawn, and then fell off considerably. The German infantry, mainly Prussians, advanced toward the sacrificial trench, where some of the French who had occupied it as decoys were still alive. The Germans crossed the trench and advanced directly into the minefield where they were met by fire from the soldiers in the first trench. Seven waves of Germans hit the second line, and each time the Americans and the French threw them back. By late afternoon, the German tide had receded, and the American and French troops moved into the sacrificial trench. But the fighting was not over.⁸⁰

⁷⁷ Wolf, 24.

⁷⁸ Wolf, 24-25.

⁷⁹ Cooke, 107.

⁸⁰ Cooke, 109.

During the evening, the French learned from German prisoners and from captured documents that there was to be another assault the following day, July 16th. From these documents and prisoners, the Allies also learned the exact time of the next attack, 4:00 a.m. Armed with this information, they prepared to counter the German attack.⁸¹

Beginning at 4:15, the French and American divisions fired their artillery at the German lines. Despite the barrage, the Germans moved forward in wave after wave. Recoiling from the defense, the Germans tried to work around the points of major resistance, but they were denied. Each time they launched another assault there was less and less effort and energy put into it.⁸² It became obvious that the Germans had spent their force in the previous day. After ten hours, the infantry attacks died out, and the two-day Battle of Champagne was at an end. Company E and the rest of the Rainbow Division had helped to deal the Germans a powerful blow.⁸³

The win wasn't without cost. Sixteen hundred Rainbow soldiers were either killed or wounded in the battle for what became known as "Lousy Champagne," lousy because of all the casualties suffered by the Division. The 150th Machine Gun Battalion lost several men, although none from Fond du Lac was killed. In a display of heroic courage, as reported by James Frew, the Battalion's doctor, Private Walter Melchoir of the 150th Machine Gun Battalion, after seeing his machine gun destroyed and his friends all dead or wounded grabbed a rifle and rushed to a company of the 165th to fight as an infantryman. He did not survive the battle.⁸⁴

In describing the Battle of Champagne, Private Myron Hammer wrote,

That was the battle in which we met the Prussian Guards. They were the best the Kaiser had. The French were in front of us and if they were unable to hold, they were to fall back. When we saw the French uniforms coming back, we thought they were the French retreating and it was not until they were almost in the trenches that we recognized them as the Huns. They were good fighters, but we piled them up.

On July 18 the 42nd began to leave the line. The members of E Company came out of the Champagne defensive with a new sense of confidence, a healthy relationship

⁸¹ Wolf, 26.

⁸² Wolf, 27-28.

⁸³ Cooke, 113.

⁸⁴ Cooke, 108.

with the French, and with a renewed hatred of the Germans. As alluded to in Private Hammer's letter, some of this new hatred resulted from the Germans having approached the American lines dressed in French uniforms that they had taken from the dead in the sacrificial trench.⁸⁵

The 42nd said goodbye to General Gouraud and listened to rumors that they were to spend some time resting before being sent to another front. While the troops enjoyed

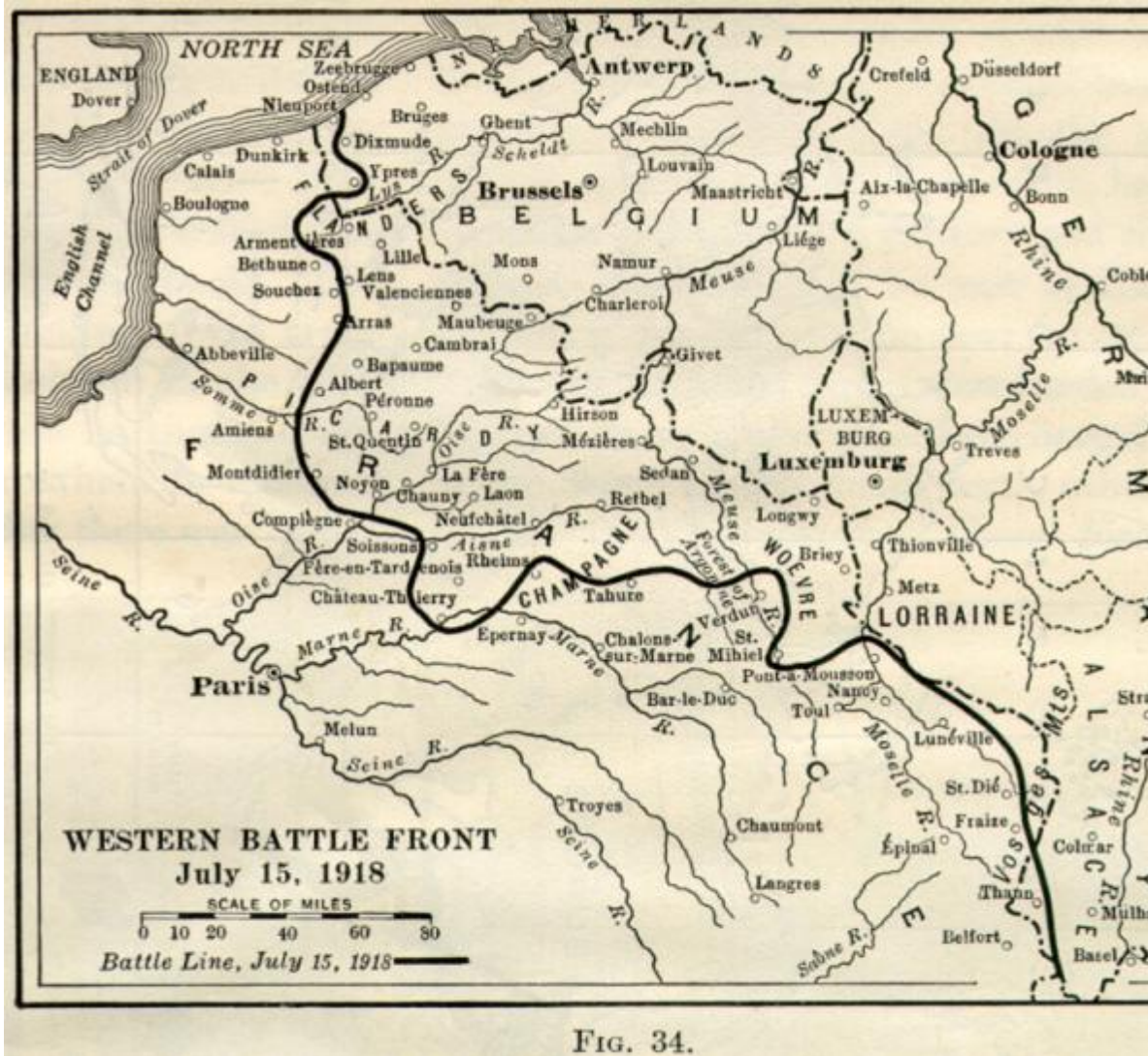


FIG. 34.

The Western Front, July 15, 1918

⁸⁵ Cooke, 133.

their well-deserved rest, on July 18 the first of the great Allied offensives of 1918 had begun. The order came on July 20 that the 42nd was to join the French 6th Army for operations on the Marne. The Division was headed for Chateau Thierry where they had heard stories that the Yankee Division was “being bled to death.”⁸⁶

Company E and the Rainbow Division had gained experience and had only received light casualties fighting in Luneville and Baccarat, but their numbers had been considerably depleted in the fighting at Champagne, but now they had to brace themselves to face what General MacArthur later called, “six of the bitterest days and nights of the war for the Rainbow.”⁸⁷

By late July 1918, the German offensives on the Western Front had died out. The Allied counterattack was on its way. The French and Americans soon cut the Soissons-Chateau Thierry road, which was the main German supply route. As the Germans began to withdraw, they left some troops behind in old farmhouses that had been turned into heavily armed forts that had to be taken one by one. The 42nd was stationed in an area that was covered with these large farms, woods, open fields, small towns, with the Ourcq River running through it. This was a different world of fighting for men of the Rainbow Division who were used to fighting defensive battles in the trenches.⁸⁸ For the first time, Company E would be fighting in an open area and engaged in offensive warfare.

The operation of the Rainbow Division was again divided into two, with each brigade, the 84th and 83rd, relieving different troops. Company E’s brigade had replaced the 170th Infantry Regiment of the French 167th Division. That division was a familiar one, having fought with the 42nd at Luneville.⁸⁹

While the 84th Brigade was involved in heavy fighting at the Croix Rouge Farm and in taking the city of Sergy, Company E and the rest of the 83rd Brigade received their orders to take the Meurcy Farm, less than a mile from the Ourcq River.⁹⁰

⁸⁶ Cooke, 113.

⁸⁷ Cooke, 114.

⁸⁸ Cooke, 120-121.

⁸⁹ Cooke, 124.

⁹⁰ Cooke, 125-126.

Both the 84th and the 83rd brigades suffered tremendous casualties taking these two farms and the city of Sergy. Realizing the seriousness of the manpower situation within the 42nd, the Division soon received two battalions of reinforcements from the 4th Infantry Division to bolster their numbers for their next offensive.⁹¹

The Rainbow Division formed up again as a whole in the city of Sergy, just east of the Ourcq River. Early in the morning of July 29, the Germans counterattacked Sergy and drove the 42nd back to the river. At 8:30 a.m., the Rainbow Division counterattacked and retook the city of Sergy. That was not the only success the Rainbow had that day. By the end of the day the division had finally taken the towns that overlooked the Ourcq River. There was no time to celebrate, for beyond their position, the division could see a set of new obstacles, the Foret de Nesles and two stone farmhouses, well fortified by German troops.⁹²

The machine gunners of the division were sent to lay heavy fire upon these three objectives. In this drive, the 150th Machine Gun Battalion, of which Company E was a part, was in continuous action for eight days. During those eight days, the 150th attacked skillfully prepared positions. They also captured great stores of arms and ammunition. They succeeded in driving the enemy back over 15 kilometers. This drive won the 150th the distinction of being one of the best machine gun battalions of the American Expeditionary Force.⁹³

Lester Ormsby wrote an account of the experiences of Company E during the offensive of Chateau Thierry.

We have been chasing the Germans pretty hard of late. I don't think this war can last very much longer from the way they are falling back. Every time we go in, there is a big number killed and if it keeps on as it is there won't be any more of them. At any rate, we are driving them back to beat the band and if they don't soon give up there won't be any more Germany. We have been so close behind the Germans while they are retreating that half of them were falling over themselves either from getting shot or falling over their own feet, they were making them go so fast. I guess that sounds good doesn't it? We have been in towns that the Germans had been occupying only a few moments before we arrived. The Huns had gone so quickly that they left pretty nearly everything they

⁹¹ Cooke, 128. Six soldiers of the company were killed in action on July 28, its bloodiest day of fighting.

⁹² Cooke, 129.

⁹³ Spears.

had. The Americans made quick work of it, eating everything that the Huns had left in their canteens and stores. Nearly all of the boys have German souvenirs. I have a German cap which I intend to send you the first change I get. Also have an officer's sword but that I will keep as long as I can't send it.

Early in the morning of August 4, General Menoher of the 42nd Division wrote to request that the Rainbow be sent "to a rest area in order to recuperate, reconstitute, reequip, and amalgamate the replacements it is to receive." The division desperately needed this rest. Six thousand men in the division, nearly a quarter of its effective strength, had been lost during this battle, compared with the 2,000 previously lost in Champagne. Menoher's request was granted, and the 77th Infantry Division was soon on its way to relieve the beaten-up Rainbow Division. In his letter Menoher requested that the Division be granted four to six weeks of rest. This was not possible, because plans were already being made for the St. Mihiel offensive, which would require the participation of the 42nd.⁹⁴

St. Mihiel represented the first coordinated offensive operations by the independent American Army that General "Black Jack" Pershing had fought so long to maintain in the face of British and French efforts to incorporate his men piecemeal into their armies.⁹⁵ Pershing's plan was to attack both faces of the German salient.

September 12, 1918, found the 42nd in the heart of the St. Mihiel drive. At one o'clock on that day, a violent rainstorm broke over the land, and at almost the same moment, the preparatory artillery fire began. The battle proved to be quite a feat for the Allies. Tanks followed the soldiers across the barbed wire lines, but because of the heavy rainfall, the tanks had a hard time crossing the rough terrain of No Man's Land. The Rainbow Division alone thrust forward on the line of the enemy until noon on September 13, at which time all of the Rainbow Division's objectives had been taken. The St. Mihiel operation progressed so rapidly that the planners were surprised. In less than 29 hours, the Division had advanced 19 kilometers behind enemy lines, creating a new front.⁹⁶ The Germans had been caught while evacuating the salient, and most of the

⁹⁴ Cooke, 133.

⁹⁵ Pershing had gained his nickname as a result of commanding the 10th Cavalry Regiment, a unit of African American troops.

⁹⁶ Cooke, 144.

German troops engaged were not first-rate. Nonetheless, as General Pershing noted, “The St. Mihiel victory probably did more than any single operation in the war to encourage the tired Allies.”⁹⁷

Private J. K. Bragg wrote a letter describing Company E’s part in the St. Mihiel drive. His letter, dated September 17, began,

On the morning of (censored) our Division was given the fun of starting (censored) with orders to drive the Huns out of their first and second line positions. This we did in less than thirty-six hours. The drive began by our artillery firing on the German’s trenches, followed two hours later by a machine gun barrage by us and the rest of the divisional machine guns for about half an hour. The while our artillery was still banging away at the Huns we went over the top and at the Germans, we never stopped for anything but our wind, of course we had to duck a few shells but that is all in the fun. A great many Americans took place in the drive. In our catch we surrounded a big hill before the Huns could get out, making a whole division of Deutsch surrender – guns and all. I am going to send you a button that I took off a Hun that had the nerve to get in my way.

St. Mihiel did not see the same loss of life that the Rainbow experienced after Champagne. In fact, St. Mihiel was not costly in terms of casualties sustained by the 42nd Division. This battle was the first time that members of the Rainbow Division saw the beginning of a break in German morale. Members of the Division reported that the German soldiers, mostly just boys, simply surrendered without a fight. A member of the 42nd from Iowa reported that one night he saw someone whom he took to be a member of his company. He called out asking for a cigarette, and suddenly he had five German soldiers surrendering to him.⁹⁸

After a period of rest from September 16 to 30, Company E, along with the rest of the division, was transferred from St. Mihiel to the Argonne Forest. Genral Pershing had agreed to commit his American Army to an offensive in that area as part of Allied plans for a general offensive to bring the war to an end. Why Pershing had agreed to attack in the Argonne is unclear. The Germans had been in occupation of the area since 1914 and had turned a natural defensive postion into a labyrinth of steel, concrete, and barbed wire fortifications punctuated with carefully sited machine guns. And behind this front lay the Kriemhilde section of the Hindenburg Line. But since he had agreed to attack anywhere,

⁹⁷ General John J. Pershing, *My Experiences in the World War* (New York: Stokes, 1931), II, 273.

⁹⁸ Cooke, 145.

so long as it was as a separate American Army, General Pershing had no real rejoinder, and perhaps assigning the Americans to this terrible sector was a final French revenge for Pershing's earlier refusal to allow individual American regiments to fill depleted French ranks.⁹⁹

The battle, which had been launched with almost breathtaking rapidity in planning, considering the months that had been required to get ready for the great offensives of 1916 and 1917, quickly bogged down into a disorganized series of small-unit actions, with staff work failing to maintain coordination among divisions. French General Pétain observed that "The Americans are good. Their soldiers have great dash, but the whole organization is clumsy."¹⁰⁰ The Americans quickly lost the advantage of overwhelming numerical superiority in the tangle of lanes, trenches, and strong points. Encouraged by Pershing, individual divisions competed to be the first to reach Sedan, producing farce in the midst of tragedy when soldiers of the U.S. 1st Division took the commander of the Rainbow Division prisoner!¹⁰¹ Company E was in the thick of the fighting in this region from the end September until the Armistice was signed and hostilities ended on November 11, 1918.¹⁰²

Corporal Ralph Granger was one of the members of Company E who was reported missing action during the Rainbow's drive in the Argonne Forest, but his case had a happy outcome. He wrote to tell his parents about the chain of events in the forest that day that led to him being reported missing.

It was the second morning we were advancing, during the drive in the Argonne, and had gone about 500 yards with the machine gun fire so heavy we were given orders to get in shell holes, of which there were plenty. I lay there for twelve hours and the Huns were planting them in as thick as hair on a dog's back. I got enough gas that day to bake a dozen pies. When it got dark I crawled out, the company had been relieved and a couple of fellows took me down to the first aid station where they gave me some stuff for the gas. I couldn't find out where the company was located so I stayed around the town all night. The next day about 2 or 3 o'clock I found the company.

⁹⁹ Leckie, 652.

¹⁰⁰ Quoted in Leckie, 653. See also Captain B. H. Liddell Hart, *The Real War: 1914-1918* (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1930), 461-469.

¹⁰¹ Liddell Hart, 469.

¹⁰² Spears. Twelve of Company E's battle deaths occurred during this period, four of them on Oct. 15.

During the final drive, the Division was subjected to heavy enemy fire as it approached Sedan, which the Germans had to hold at all costs, as its rail lines dominated the supply line for much of the front. The Germans held on to the last, quitting only when the Allied troops got to the town line. The Rainbow Division pushed up to the outskirts of the town and then gave way to French troops. A French Division took the lead and occupied the town as the 42nd started back toward a rest area. On the march to the rest area, they heard the news of the Armistice.¹⁰³

News that should have been received with joy was instead met initially with skepticism, for the men had fallen victim to unfounded rumors of peace before. But that night, when they saw unprotected fires in the open fields, something never before allowed, they finally realized the truth of the report.¹⁰⁴ In a letter home, Lieutenant Vogt of Company E wrote about the reaction the soldiers had upon learning of peace. “The boys were too tired to celebrate on Armistice Day. They had more concern about sleep than celebrating. We rested for a few days in an open field, all the buildings in the area having been leveled by the big guns.”

The Rainbow Division was chosen to enter Germany as part of the army of occupation. The troops began their march into Germany by crossing through Belgium on November 21, into Luxemburg on November 23, and then finally marched into Germany on December 3.¹⁰⁵ The soldiers of Company E were part of the Division that marched into Germany. Ben Gerred, a member of Company E, wrote a letter home from “Somewhere in Belgium” describing the way American soldiers were greeted by the Belgian people.

I wish that you could see the difference in the other people on this side. I suppose you have noticed the new headline. We crossed the line this morning with the band playing, the Belgian people waving flags and hollering, ‘Vive L’ America’ we sure got a hearty welcome. My squad and I slept in a house with a Belgian family and they kept the light burning until 11 o’clock. The lady of the house told us that it was the longest she had had the light lit in four years. We were the first Americans in the town. They sure are a bunch of fine people and give the Americans great credit.

¹⁰³ “Forty-Second Division One of Best in France,” *The Stars and Stripes*, April 4, 1935.

¹⁰⁴ “Company E Boys Would Enjoy Being Sent Home,” *The Daily Reporter*, February 18, 1919.

¹⁰⁵ “Company E Boys Would Enjoy Being Sent Home,” *The Daily Reporter*, February 18, 1919.

Gerred continued his letter the next day from 'Somewhere in Luxemburg'.

We got in here last night. The people are O.K. A few of us are sleeping in a room which the family here used as a living room and it is a fine place. The man of the house tells us that the Boche soldiers did not mind going to the front so much but they didn't want to fight opposite the American soldiers.

Gerred also expressed the sentiment that most of the soldiers of Company E serving in the army of occupation must have felt.

Thank Goodness the big show is over and as quick as they get things arranged we will be home with our feet under the table and eating a piece of mother's home made pie. I don't believe I will want to see any more of the world that I have seen and will see before I get home.

From December 15, 1918 until April 17, 1919, when they boarded the ship *Pretoria* and headed for home, Company E remained in the army of occupation in the Ahrweiler region of Germany, near Koblenz. During that time, two of its members died of pneumonia, probably due to the influenza epidemic. It had been nearly two years since the day when the boys of the company had left Fond du Lac to "make the world safe for democracy." The soldiers of Company E proved that soldiers from Wisconsin were as loyal and brave as soldiers from any state in the Union. As part of the Rainbow Division, the soldiers of Company E had gained a remarkable reputation for gallantry, but at a terrific cost. No company from Wisconsin suffered more casualties than Company E.¹⁰⁶ The soldiers were in action in the Luneville sector of Lorraine February 21-March 23, 1918, in Baccarat sector of Lorraine March 31-June 21, 1918, in Champagne July 4-July 17, 1918, in the Aisne-Marne Offensive September 12-16, 1918, the St. Mihiel Offensive September 12-16, 1918, at Woevre (Verdun) September 17-30, 1918, in the Meuse-Argonne Offensive October 7-November 1 and November 5-10, 1918, twelve major actions in all. It is their bravery which earned them the title, "The Pride of Fond du Lac."

¹⁰⁶ *Fond du Lac's Part in the World War*, Compiled by The Wisconsin News (Federal Printing Co., Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1921). The Rainbow Division as a whole lost 2,713 dead, 13,292 wounded, and 102 taken prisoner. Distinguished Service Crosses were awarded to 205 of its soldiers, including two, posthumously, to members of Company E.

A Home Away from Home:

German Prisoners of War in Fond du Lac County during World War II

Jesse Ruth

Americans often think of POW camps as places within which Americans have been imprisoned. For example, one can often spot a POW-MIA flag flying in remembrance of those captured or lost in the Vietnam conflict. Hollywood films like “The Great Escape” and television program like “Hogan’s Heroes” reinforce this point of view. In more recent times, when prisoners are mentioned, the focus has often been on foreign POWs imprisoned by Americans. The camp at Guantanamo used to contain al Qaida prisoners and other enemy combattants, and the notorious abuses at Abu Ghraib Prison in Baghdad readily come to mind.¹ Many, however, are probably not aware of the numerous POW camps that were established across the United States during World War II to house Axis prisoners. Several of these camps were in Wisconsin, and Fond du Lac saw its share of German prisoners of war. At first the exotic nature of the POWs captured the attention of Fond du Lac residents, but the economic advantages derived from their much-needed labor sustained local interest. Because Wisconsin’s agricultural economy needed labor, the state utilized German POWs extensively. Ultimately, Wisconsin farmers and agricultural businesses and, arguably, the prisoners themselves benefited from their experiences.

The United States played by the rules of war in treatment of its World War II POWs. There were, of course, very real rules to be followed that had emerged out of previous conflicts. The Geneva Conventions established guidelines that stressed fair treatment of POWs.

During the spring and summer of 1929, representatives of the many nations of the world met in Geneva, Switzerland, to revise the codification of international laws concerning prisoners of war. These negotiations reached a conclusion with the signing on

¹ BBC World News, January 16, 2002; Seymore M. Hersh, “Torture at Abu Ghraib,” *New Yorker*, May 10, 2004.

July 27, 1929 of the Geneva Prisoner of War Convention and the Geneva Red Cross Convention for the Amelioration of the Condition of the Wounded and Sick Armies of the Field. The 97 articles and one annex of the Prisoner of War Convention sought to lessen the rigors of war and to ease the circumstances of the prisoners. But some obligations were also imposed on the prisoners. Among other things, the Convention required POW's, other than officers, to work for the benefit of the captors; however, the work could not be directly related to war operations, and it could not jeopardize the health and safety of the prisoners. The 1929 Red Cross Convention replaced the Red Cross Conventions of 1864 and 1926 and defined the status of captured enemy sick and wounded. These international agreements became the basis for treatment of prisoners of war for those nations that had signed the conventions, including the United States and Germany.²

The United States Government followed these rules with respect to prisoners captured during World War II, and so it was that German POWs captured during the period 1942-1945 were placed into an environment that was infused with a sense of civility. Because the State of Wisconsin had been extensively shaped by the German culture of many immigrants, and because many of its residents retained a sense of German heritage, some POWs who were located in that state found their stay in Wisconsin almost pleasant. The camps located in and around Fond du Lac County were no exception in this regard.

Of course when one speaks of German prisoners or war, it might be better to refer to prisoners taken while they were in service in the German army. This is because it was not the case that Hitler's *Wehrmacht*, or armed forces, was composed exclusively of German citizens or even of ethnic Germans. In 1944 the first wave of prisoners to arrive in Wisconsin probably was composed largely of ethnic Germans who had been taken prisoner during the North African campaign that concluded in May 1943. According to Allied records, it has been estimated that about 102,000 Germans were taken prisoner

² George G. Lewis and John Mewha, *History of Prisoner of War Utilization by the United States Army, 1776-1945*, (Washington, D.C.: Department of the Army, 1955), 66.

during the early stages of the war.³ But as the Nazis' empire expanded, their armies ballooned in size, and their military might incorporated thousands of inhabitants from the areas that had been conquered by the Axis forces, many of whom were not German at all.

The prisoners were Romanians, Swiss, Russian, Luxemburgers, Poles, Czechs, Yugoslavs, Arabs, Dutch, French, Austrians and included three Jews. Some were from Finland, Estonia, Belgium, Siberia, Lithuania and Ukraine. Most of these men were from countries overrun by the Germans, had been forced to fight by the Germans, and most of these men threw their guns down when they saw the American soldiers. They were in German uniforms so they were treated as German prisoners.⁴

Overall, some 19,000 prisoners brought into Wisconsin had been soldiers in the German Army.⁵ There were also more than 3500 Japanese prisoners brought into the state, most of them late in 1945, but local Fond du Lac newspapers made little mention of Japanese prisoners, apart from reporting the escape and recapture of six of them in three different incidents during 1945. The Japanese were held at Camp McCoy, near Sparta, and enjoyed few of the privileges of work outside the camps afforded to German prisoners.⁶

Enemy POWs were held in almost every American state. There were 150 central base camps and 511 branch camps spread throughout 46 states.⁷ Most POWs were held in Texas, Oklahoma, Georgia and Arkansas, but Wisconsin housed a significant number.⁸ The Wisconsin camps were administered from Fort Sheridan, Illinois, which oversaw a district that included northern Illinois, Wisconsin, and the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. There were 39 camps within the state of Wisconsin, and each camp held from 150 to 600 prisoners.⁹ As of April 1, 1945, there were 311,630 German prisoners in the United States, and perhaps as many as 100,000 scheduled to arrive after that date, due to the need

³ Rick Atkinson, *An Army At Dawn: The War in North Africa, 1942-1943*, (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 2002), 537.

⁴ Marlys Manley Steckler, "POWs in Wisconsin during WWII," (Unpublished Pamphlet, Wisconsin State Historical Society: Madison, Wisconsin).

⁵ Maureen Blaney Flietner, "Tales of state's POW camps come to light," *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, August 14, 2000, sec. B.

⁶ Flietner. For Japanese escapees, see articles in *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 24, 28, and 29, July 5, 9, and 18, and August 11, 1945.

⁷ Steckler.

⁸ Steckler.

⁹ Flietner.

for their labor.¹⁰ By June 23, the number of German prisoners in the United States had risen to 370,000, and there were also 50,000 Italians and 4,000 Japanese. Of these, 150,000 were used “in connection with military work,” including work in POW camps, 30,000 were assigned to labor for the air force or navy, and 140,000 were employed in agriculture, food processing, cutting pulpwood, and other labor.¹¹

Typically, POWs were sent to a state, assigned to a camp, and worked as unskilled labor in whatever industries existed there. Wisconsin, as one might expect, put its prisoners to work in agriculture and related industries. The majority of prisoners worked in one of Wisconsin’s many canning factories, but some helped harvest crops or tended cranberry marshes. Since many Wisconsin men had gone off to war, POWs helped to replace their labor in order to keep the agricultural economy functioning.¹²

Not only POWs were used to keep Wisconsin agriculture functioning. Laborers from Barbadoes (more than 100 in Fond du Lac), Jamaica, and Mexico all worked in the vicinity of Fond du Lac, Ripon, Brandon, Rosendale, and Brownsville during the war, harvesting sugar beets and cucumbers. Their rate of pay was 30 cents per hour, plus piece-work incentives, little more than half of the prevailing wages for American agricultural workers at the time, although they received free medical and dental care as part of their six-month contracts.¹³ Their presence is a clear indication of the labor shortage in Wisconsin agriculture that made it attractive and profitable to employ the POWs in the state.

Besides aiding local industries, POW camps provided other advantages to their host communities. The camps provided jobs for local inhabitants and brought additional

¹⁰ “German Prisoners of War in this Country to Remain Captive for Some Time to Come,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, May 23, 1945.

¹¹ “Prisoners of War Get Meat But It Consists Chiefly of Cuts Americans Often Reject,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 23, 1945.

¹² This decision met with some objection. Wisconsin State Federation of Labor President George Habermas objected to plans to use prisoners of war to cut pulp wood in Wisconsin and Michigan, arguing that sufficient manpower was available if agricultural workers could be assured that cutting pulp wood did not jeopardize their draft status. “State Unions Oppose Prisoner Labor Plan,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, January 3, 1944.

¹³ “Volunteers from Far-Away Island of Barbadoes Working on County Sugar Beet Crop,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 22, 1944.

business to local stores, restaurants and landlords. Wisconsin communities all profited from the money generated by camp personnel and their families. In effect, the POW camps strengthened local economies and provided a sort of life support for many labor-starved and struggling Wisconsin towns and farms.

One of the many fascinating aspects of the American World War II POW camp story is that the camps actually paid for themselves. Few local or state funds were used to sustain the camps, and the only federal assistance was actually generated by the labor of the POWs themselves. Businesses that contracted to use POW labor paid the prevailing rate for agricultural labor, 50-60 cents per hour, and the Treasury kept all but about 10 cents per hour that was paid to the prisoners in the form of coupons that could be used or, theoretically, kept and redeemed for cash at the time of repatriation. It was estimated that it cost about 35 cents per day to feed each of the prisoners, compared to 85 cents a day to feed one of their guards.¹⁴

POWs were paid 80 cents a day in chit (paper) money that could be used at the canteens. In some canteens they could even buy beer. The people who hired POWs had to pay the government for the labor performed. In 1944, the federal government made a profit of 100 million dollars from POW labor. Much of the money was used for feeding and housing the prisoners and for re-education programs, so the POWs were basically self supporting.¹⁵

Working prisoners actually received 90 cents per day, because all prisoners received ten cents per day, regardless of whether they worked. The money the prisoners earned was often used for their education. Many times this education produced a sort of assimilation or at least attraction to American culture, which may explain why some POWs returned to the site of their incarceration after the war. American History was the primary focus of the educational curriculum, intended to provide the prisoners with new perspectives. In a sense, this program was analogous to rehabilitation programs offered in civilian prisons. It is also interesting to note that the "POWs were shown movies about German concentration camps," presumably documentaries made after the camps were liberated in

¹⁴ "War Captives Assigned for Cannery Jobs," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 19, 1945.

¹⁵ Steckler.

1945.¹⁶ It seems that the government not only wanted to give the POWs insight into the values of the United States, but wanted to give them a view into German misdeeds that would not have been available in Germany.

Starting in the summer of 1944, German POWs began to arrive in Fond du Lac. The prisoners were taken to a branch camp constructed especially for their arrival that was located at the Fond du Lac County fairgrounds. According to commanding officer Colonel William H. McCarty, the Fond du Lac camp was designated as “one of the 14 branch camps in Wisconsin for German prisoners of war to assist with pea canning and corn packs of Wisconsin.” First Lieutenant Harold V. Smith and Second Lieutenant Walter F. Dempsey were put in command of the new camp. Other branch camps in Green Lake and Plymouth were established at the same time.¹⁷

At first, the newspapers were silent regarding the POWs, because a War Department regulation “prohibited the publication” of any news concerning a POW group arrival. Possibly this regulation was put into place in order to protect the POWs from possible violence, although it may also have been generated out of fear that enemy agents could possibly assist a mass escape of POWs. Efforts were made to avoid contact between local citizens and the prisoners. The public was banned from the camp area, and special officers were assigned to direct traffic near the fairgrounds. However, despite efforts to maintain secrecy, some 200 Fond du Lac residents witnessed a procession of prisoners march down Macy Street, Court Street, Main Street, Fourth Street, Fond du Lac Avenue and onward to the Fond du Lac County fairgrounds. This march must have been an eerie sight. It was reported that the POWs marched in song as armed military police walked alongside them. Each of the prisoners had a prisoner of war stamp, simply a “PW” painted on their jacket, and they carried personal items; one man carried a mandolin.¹⁸

¹⁶ Steckler.

¹⁷ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 20, 1944.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The paucity of news about the camp generated some strange stories. Exploration of refuse from the camp by Charles Scheibach, caretaker at the city dump on North Hickory Street, led to a complaint being registered that the prisoners were wasting fuel by discarding partially burned coal together with the ash. Scheibach, who occasionally had an opportunity to converse with some of the prisoners, pronounced them to be very satisfied with their circumstances.¹⁹

It appears as though POW groups were periodically rotated in and out of the Fond du Lac camp. This may have had to do with the fact that the fairground camp was a branch camp, as opposed to a central base camp, although the prisoners in Fond du Lac were there to help with seasonal agricultural labor, so it was likely that they would be moved when the immediate need for their work had been satisfied. About two months after the first group arrived in Fond du Lac, the camp was abandoned, and the POWs were relocated. Again, per War Department regulations, the destination wasn't disclosed to the public or the press. At the time of the first POW departure, the citizens of Fond du Lac weren't sure if there would be another group brought to the city. Adding to the uncertainty were reports that other area camps had also lost POWs.

Several hundred prisoners, who had been at a similar camp at Green Lake, left about a week ago for Michigan but the Sixth Service Command of the army at Chicago since has announced that the camp would be operated for the rest of the summer, presumably with other prisoners to replace the first contingent. No announcement has been made by the army as to whether there will be any further activity at the fairgrounds camp here (Fond du Lac). Prisoners who had been stationed at a similar camp at Beaver Dam also broke camp on Friday and left for an unannounced destination.²⁰

Fond du Lac's uncertainty about its status as a host for a POW camp, did not last long. The fairgrounds camp operated through the years 1944 and 1945, at least until the end of the corn pack season in the autumn of 1945. Local newspapers kept track of most major developments at the county fairgrounds as groups of prisoners shuttled through the camp. Efforts were made to limit interaction between prisoners and local residents, but

¹⁹ "Prisoners Must be Well Fed, Says Custodian at City Dump; Refuse Gives Him Good Clue," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 11, 1944.

²⁰ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 5, 1944.

the 39 guards at the Fond du Lac camp were another matter. A July 3, 1944 *Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter* article described efforts to provide recreation for the men, sponsored by the Y.M.C.A., designated as the local U.S.O. center for the city, and local Girl Scout leader Mrs. F.C. Forbush. Assistance with transportation for the men was requested as well as donations of fishing and golfing equipment for the guards' recreational use.

Despite the official ban, anecdotes and stories about interactions between the POWs and local residents continued to circulate for years after the end of the war. In the Green Lake area, POWs were once kept at what is now the American Baptist Assembly and Lawsonia. The stories most often repeated recount how local farmers with German ties brought food to the prisoners. Actually, the most vivid story describes how farmers' wives baked bread and tossed the loaves over the perimeter fencing of the camp. While these stories are not documented in the local newspapers, they seem plausible, and they are certainly in keeping with similar tales told in other parts of the state.

The Green Lake camp was one of the housing facilities for POWs who worked in and around Ripon, Wisconsin, on the western edge of Fond du Lac County. By mid-summer, 1944, 250 POWs were kept on the Lawsonia grounds in Green Lake and assisted "in the operations in the Ripon and neighboring canning and vining areas."²¹ The camp was a great source of curiosity for the people of Green Lake, Ripon and the surrounding towns. There were also concerns. A month into its operation, in July 1944, the Green Lake Kiwanis Club arranged for an informational meeting to counteract any worries citizens in the surrounding communities might have had about the camp. Lieutenant John W. Scott was the guest speaker at this function. Scott explained that the War Department had assigned POWs to the area camp in order to "assist in the harvesting of crops, as well as being employed at certain lines of labor in the canneries."²² He went on to explain that Ripon canning companies were concerned about how they would be

²¹ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 21, 1944 (news from Ripon section).

²² *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 12, 1944 (news from Ripon section).

able to handle 150,000 acres of “highly perishable food” and it was determined that a shipment of POWs could help to alleviate their labor worries.²³

A second informational meeting, primarily for the local Rotary Club but open to other local groups, was given at the Tuscumbia Country Club in Green Lake. This time, the camp second-in-command, Lieutenant Francis Walsh, was the guest speaker. As helpful as the two meetings were, the informationals failed to end all of the rumors regarding the new camp. Townspeople were still leery of having the group of enemy soldiers in their midst. It was reported that the guards at Lawsonia were lax and “there had been a certain amount of fraternizing between civilians and the prisoners.”²⁴ A committee was organized by the local American Legion post and sent to the camp in order to assess the situation. The Legion’s stance was that the POWs were not guests of Green Lake, and they discouraged any association between the prisoners and the civilian population. This was also the War Department’s policy, which was intended to protect both parties.

Ultimately, the Legion found that there had been no cause for alarm. The camp was in transition, as it had only been in existence for a few months, and any questionable contacts that might have occurred soon ceased, or at least were no longer reported. After the American Legion inspection, the rumors of ineffective guards and prisoner-to-citizen contacts could finally be put to rest.

However, not long after the Legion checkup, two “escapes” of local POWs occurred. In the first instance, two POWs scaled a camp fence. It turned out that they were not really trying to escape. Instead, they were in search of what was later found to be a place to go swimming. After they scaled the fence, the two Germans had conversed with sixteen-year-old Rex Ritchie and asked him if he knew where a beach might be found. The boy quickly related the story to his employer, Henry Eaton, who promptly notified the sheriff’s department. With that tip to assist him, Sheriff Al Christiansen of Green Lake soon recaptured the two men. The story made it into the local newspapers,

²³ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 12, 1944 (news from Ripon section).

²⁴ *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 15, 1944.

but it was soon forgotten, once it became clear that the two POWs weren't bent on an escape but merely wanted to take a quick swim.²⁵ The other "escapee" apparently walked away from a crew working on pea vines and went to the Solamita tavern in Marblehead, located in rural Fond du Lac County. When this was discovered, guard units were recalled to their base, including through messages flashed in local movie theatres, and police were notified. The public messages triggered some local alarm, leading to what the newspaper described as "greatly exaggerated" reports that spread through the city. The prisoner was arrested by an F.B.I. agent and a sheriff's deputy about two hours after he had left the crew.²⁶

Despite early concerns and problems, the POWs rapidly became an essential part of the local landscape. Not only did local residents become comfortable with the fact that POWs were incarcerated nearby, but they even began to accept them into the community. Whatever stigma had been attached at the time of their arrival seemed to melt away with time. It is hard to determine whether or not this can be attributed to the friendly nature of Fond du Lac, Ripon and Green Lake residents, the family ties of many area residents to Germany, the contributions that the prisoners were making to the local economy, the lack of "trouble" caused by the prisoners, or just an acceptance born of familiarity. Several or all of these factors were probably at work, but a good deal of anecdotal evidence testifies to the friendliness of both local people and the prisoners.

Sally Albertz, who lived on 14th Street near the camp during the war, remembers visiting the Fond du Lac Fairgrounds camp as a child. The prisoners were friendly; many spoke good English, and they tossed candy to the children through the barbed wire. Mrs. Albertz recalls that she got a spanking from her parents every time she went to the camp, but she kept going back, as did many other local children. She also recalls her mother-in-law, who was originally resentful of the German POWs working at canneries in Oakfield and Rosendale. Her three sons were fighting in North Africa, Italy, and later Germany.

²⁵ "War Prisoners Stage Runaway," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 21, 1944.

²⁶ "War Prisoner Discovered in Rural Tavern," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 22, 1944.

But as a German speaker, soon she was friendly with the prisoners and later made German food for them.²⁷

Dr. Mary Gross recalls stories from her grandparents, who hired three or four German POWs from the fairgrounds camp in Plymouth, Sheboygan County to “labor” on their farm. But the POWs were given no work to do; they were simply fed and sat in the family kitchen, talking with family members about Germany. Eventually the fact that the men were doing no work came to the attention of camp authorities, and the privilege of hiring POW labor was withdrawn. According to Dr. Gross, this behavior was frequent enough that eventually POWs were no longer permitted to work on farms, and their labor was restricted to area canneries where tighter control on their activities could be maintained.²⁸

Donald E. Bonk, a Chilton farmer whose father ran the Chilton cannery, recollected as a teenager seeing girls flirting through the barbed wire fence with the prisoners and other residents passing by asking for information about relatives in Germany. According to Bonk, “Half of the people in Chilton and New Holstein could speak German.”²⁹

Probably the most dramatic instance of fraternization that became public involved Mrs. Marie Wildeman of Waupun, wife of a sailor on active duty in the Pacific, who was placed on a year’s probation after pleading guilty “to a statutory offense involving a German prisoner of war.” According to the newspaper, “neighbors complained to police after they saw the man enter the house in the evening on several occasions. He was said to have worn a raincoat which he had reversed so the ‘PW’ letters did not show.” The prisoner in question, Horst Wirst, worked as an interpreter in the camp near Waupun. Wirst was transferred to Fort Sheridan and received two weeks on bread and water and sixteen days’ hard labor, the maximum allowed.³⁰

²⁷ Sally Albertz interview, December 17, 2004.

²⁸ Dr. Mary Gross interview, December 17, 2004.

²⁹ “POWs harvested the region’s crops in ’45,” *Appleton-Neenah-Menasha Post Cresecent*, May 29, 1994.

³⁰ “Woman Tells Offense with War Prisoner,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 21, 1945.

Life in the camps was designed to be as “normal” as possible for the inmates, for they were expected to be productive workers, and boredom was likely to produce mischief from the prisoners that would make the job of guarding them much more difficult. POWs had access to “sports equipment, musical instruments and books . . . soccer, chess, cards, skat and checkers . . . glee clubs, bands and orchestras.”³¹ The Fond du Lac camp even received deliveries of beer every other day for its POWs, at least during 1944!³² It is remarkable that the prisoners were able to enjoy such luxuries, and, not surprisingly, there was a noticeable lack of resistance or complaints from the inmates of the camps. However, the absence of resistance or disruption was only part of the picture. Camp commanders, guards and even local citizens, despite the official regulations, often came to befriend the POWs. In a *Milwaukee Journal* article regarding German POWs in Wisconsin during World War II, Maureen Blaney Flietner wrote:

Another part that struck me was that it seemed as if the German POWs were respected and welcomed in the community and, in the eyes of local people, maintained their dignity. But this is such a heavily German American community, these people could have been their cousins or second cousins.³³

One might surmise that some local residents had close family members, perhaps cousins, uncles, or aunts, in Germany. To be sure, they felt connected to the POWs, for both parties were, essentially, from the same ancestral stock.

It is both ironic and disturbing, but not surprising, that the German prisoners were treated better than some American-born minorities who were engaged in similar kinds of labor. In other words, there existed none of the tensions and divisions that characterized the relations between American born blacks and whites at that time. “Jim Crow” laws were still in effect, and Afro-American soldiers were struggling against discrimination in a still-segregated military. This idea is touched upon briefly in *The Barbed-Wire College*: Ron Robin explains that “the POWs are invoked as an illustration of the irrationality of

³¹ Steckler.

³² “German Prisoners Stationed at Fairgrounds Camp Leave for Unannounced Destination,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 5, 1944.

³³ Flietner.

segregation, when a group of African-American soldiers are denied access to a Kansas diner, while German POWs enter the establishment freely.”³⁴

By 1945, the War Department had become less concerned with secrecy and more interested in making sure that publicity about the camps did not reflect badly on its administration of them. Fond du Lac residents learned that German prisoners would be used extensively in the area during that summer due to a shortage of civilian labor for local canneries and farms. It was reported that the Silver Creek Canning Company, Central Wisconsin Canneries, Inc. of Ripon, the Fuhrman Canning Company of Berlin, Wisconsin State Canneries of Pickett, and the Central Wisconsin Canneries at Rosendale all would make use of German prisoners housed at a stockade camp in Ripon. The camp was to be located south of the Central Wisconsin Canneries plant on Douglas Street. Fencing, some small buildings for camp operation, and a flood lighting system were installed by June 16, and a representative of the cannery reported that a crew of 40 German prisoners and 20 guards would arrive within a week to commence final construction work on an administration building, bath houses, and “other necessary buildings.” The prisoners were to be quartered in tents, with a large tent used as a dining hall. Approximately 616 POWs were expected to arrive before the beginning of the canning season, together with camp staff consisting of four commissioned officers and 90 enlisted men. Similar camps were planned for Waupun, Fair Water, and Oakfield.³⁵ Camp construction was under way by June 22.³⁶ Prisoners at the Ripon came from many different formations of the German army, including the elite *Afrika Korps* and humble *Volksturm* conscript units composed of old men and young boys.³⁷

³⁴ Ron Robin, *The Barbed-Wire College: Reeducating German POWs in the United States during World War II*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press), 3. See also “Carefully Chosen German Prisoners of War Trained in Principles of Democracy,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 22, 1945.

³⁵ “Ripon Stockade Will House Nazi War Captives Working in Canneries During Summer,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 16, 1945.

³⁶ “War Prisoners Erecting Camp,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 22, 1945.

³⁷ “War Prisoners Are Working Efficiently, Managers of Canning Factories Declare; 600 Germans Help Save County Harvest,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 3, 1945.

Due to the concentration of pea raising and canning in the Fond du Lac area, this part of the state received more prisoners than any other, about 2,200 during 1945. Ripon received the largest portion of these, about 600, of whom 200 worked in Ripon canneries, 215 in Rosendale, 60 in Berlin, and 120 in Pickett. Two plants in Waupun received 230, 100 were assigned to Brandon, 15 to Oakfield, 110 to Eden, 50 to Brownsville, 40 to Lomira, 115 to Fox Lake, 175 to Beaver Dam, 340 to Markesan, 40 to Fair Water, and about 300 to Chilton District, which encompassed several smaller communities. It was announced that army control would be much more rigid than had been the case the previous year, with all contracts for prisoner labor made through Arlie Mucks, state supervisor of the emergency farm labor program, and with the stipulation that prisoners would be removed whenever the ordinary civilian supply of labor was adequate “to meet the demand.” Brigadier General John T. Pierce, the commander of the district at Fort Sheridan, Illinois, indicated that the army would make this determination, not the canneries.³⁸

The army was at pains to show that the prisoners were not being “coddled” and that the prisoners were not eating as well as American civilians, who were subject to wartime rationing, or as America’s own soldiers and sailors. Unlike the situation that had existed in Fond du Lac in 1944, no beer was to be provided, nor were candy or ready-made cigarets to be available. The camp canteens where prisoners could use their “chits” were stocked only with loose tobacco, cigaret papers, razor blades, toilet articles, and American magazines. This limitation was largely intended to meet complaints from resentful citizens who were feeling the pinch of wartime rationing. It was noted that the food served to the prisoners amounted to about half what would be available to a civilian through rationing, and that no beef would be served to them. The diet was to include principally carp, pickled herring, potatoes and green vegetables, and no butter, only margarine was to be used.³⁹ Other meats included in the prisoners’ diets were “usually the parts of the animal that are not consumed in any quantity by Americans, such as tripe,

³⁸ “War Captives Assigned for Cannery Jobs,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 19, 1945.

³⁹ “War Captives Assigned for Cannery Jobs,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 19, 1945.

pig knuckles, fat back, and so forth.” Meat from beef (apparently not served in Fond du Lac according to the official statement) was limited to “shanks, flanks, skirts, livers, hearts, kidneys, oxtails, tripe, brains, and green bones.” Caloric intake was set at 3,400 for those doing heavy labor, 3,000 for moderate work, and 2,500 for non-working prisoners.⁴⁰

The prisoners remained in the Fond du Lac County locations for about four to five weeks during the “pea pack.” They then were shifted to Door County to pick cherries or to Illinois or Michigan to harvest other perishable crops, and some later returned to Fond du Lac to harvest sugar beets and corn for packing.⁴¹ Apparently the labor shortage was severe enough and the harvest large enough during the 1945 pea packing season that some American soldiers from Fort Sheridan were even bused in to help can peas on the night shift at the Baker Canning company in Theresa, supplementing the German prisoners, Jamaican contract laborers and civilian volunteers from the community.⁴² Other means to meet the demands of a 1945 bumper crop were utilized. For example, work norms for the German prisoners were adjusted to make certain that the harvest goals were met, with prisoners being informed that they would remain in the fields until they had picked the established number of pails of cherries.⁴³

Once the main packing season had concluded, the camp in Chilton was closed, and others had their contingents of prisoners greatly reduced, as the labor force was shifted to neighboring states. About 1,000 of the German soldiers in the Fond du Lac area were transferred, though some returned to help with later-ripening crops. The Ripon camp population declined from 597 prisoners to 143, while that at Oakfield was reduced

⁴⁰ “Prisoners of War Get Meat But It Consists Chiefly of Cuts Americans Often Reject,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 23, 1945. Caloric intake for those doing heavy work was later raised to 3,700. “War Prisoners Are Working Efficiently, Managers of Canning Factories Declare; 600 Germans Help Save County Harvest,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 3, 1945.

⁴¹ “War Captives Assigned for Cannery Jobs,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, June 19, 1945; “41 POW Camps Set Up in Labor Shortage Areas,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 13, 1945; “Enemy War Prisoners to Harvest Cherries,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 18, 1945.

⁴² “Soldiers Help Pack Pea Crop,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 20, 1945.

⁴³ “Prisoners Heed Work Mandates,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 3, 1945.

from 355 to 150, and Markesan sent 275 of its 390 prisoners to Michigan.⁴⁴ Mammoth Springs Canning Company of Oakfield finished its pea pack late in the summer, and the 337 prisoners still in the camp in mid-August were set to work helping to harvest corn and other late crops.⁴⁵ By the end of August, large numbers of prisoners were returning to the Ripon area camps. Perhaps as many as 800 were sought for employment in Ripon, Rosendale, and Pickett, but Lieutenant Kerol Lula, officer in charge of the Ripon camp, indicated to the canneries that only 650 POWs were available.⁴⁶

A total of 4,927 foreign workers and German prisoners of war, including 2,840 POWs, worked on state farms and canneries during August 1945 to bring in a bumper crop that would otherwise have overwhelmed available labor. Their numbers were augmented by an additional 1,842 prisoners brought in for the corn harvest.⁴⁷

As layoffs from wartime industry released more workers into the civilian economy, the use of German prisoners in agricultural industry declined.⁴⁸ Plans were soon under way to begin repatriating German war prisoners located in the Midwest as soon as the harvest was completed. Contracting for prisoner labor ended on October 31, with the exception of a small number of men harvesting pulpwood or sugar beets, mainly in the Upper Peninsula. It was expected that the prisoners would all be returned to Europe by spring 1946.⁴⁹ On October 11, 1945, the Ripon camp on Douglas Street, the largest in the area, closed.⁵⁰

The German POW program was economically successful, but it had other goals, as well. As the course of the war began to move steadily in the Allies' favor, the War Department began to plan for an end to the conflict and for the reintegration of the POWs

⁴⁴ "German Prisoners to Leave for Work in Nearby States as Pea Canning Season Ends," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 6, 1945.

⁴⁵ "Canning Plant Finishes Pack," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 14, 1945.

⁴⁶ "More Assigned to Prison Camp," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 27, 1945; "War Prisoners to Aid Canners," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 1, 1945.

⁴⁷ "Foreigners, Captives Work on Badger Farms," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 1, 1945.

⁴⁸ "Restrictions Put on War Prisoner Labor," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, August 18, 1945.

⁴⁹ "War Prisoners to be Returned," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 21, 1945

⁵⁰ "War Captives Removed from Camp at Ripon," *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, October 13, 1945.

into a post-war German society. An integral part of this process was the development of an education program for the POWs that could help to shape that society. Toward this end, a Special Projects Division was created.

The program began as a covert effort. A cadre of university professors joined forces with a group of “safe” prisoners in preparing material for this secret operation. A monitored diet of reading material provided the main tool for this phase of reeducation. For the most part, the reeducation program, known officially as the Special Projects Division (SPD), relied on a newspaper edited by prisoner-collaborators as well as on a series of great literary works that had been banned by the Nazis.⁵¹

In addition to literary works, prisoners were introduced to a “crash course phase” of the program. These crash courses included: German history and American civilization, language and literature.⁵²

While most German POWs remained in the United States for months after Germany surrendered, due to the need for their labor and the logistical difficulties of repatriation to a war-ravaged Europe, the United States began to send some prisoners back to Europe even before the end of the war. Some of the prisoners were trained to be able to help administer and police the American occupation zone of Germany.⁵³ The War Department had more extensive education programs in store for these early releases. Education was seen to be a vaccine of sorts. The U.S. wanted to send these men back inoculated against the kind of political and social problems and attitudes that it was believed had caused the war.

Near the end of the war, the United States took about 25,000 selected POWs and put them through an advanced education program on how to rebuild their countries. They were sent home before the end of the war because the U.S. had made a pact with France to send the POWs to help build France and other countries.⁵⁴

Eventually, all POWs were sent back to Europe and relocated in new camps. The goal was to aid in rebuilding the ravaged continent. Life in a European work camp, however,

⁵¹ Robin, 8.

⁵² Robin, 10.

⁵³ “Carefully Chosen German Prisoners of War Trained in Principles of Democracy,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, September 22, 1945.

⁵⁴ Steckler.

was not the pleasant experience that the American camps had been. In France, POWs were forced to work up to 80 hours a week, lived in filth and had little to eat.⁵⁵ One wonders how much of the educational work done to prepare the prisoners for a role in rebuilding a democratized Germany was undone by the harsh treatment they received at the hands of the French.

There are many stories regarding prisoners expressing their wish to remain in the United States. In *Stalag Wisconsin*, Betty Cowley wrote, “partly a result of their exposure to American media, its people and technology, and the humane treatment received throughout their stay, many German prisoners inquired about staying in America, rather than returning to their homeland.”⁵⁶ In response to a question regarding escape, a German POW in Fond du Lac was heard to reply, “what, run away from this? Why, this is heaven. The War is over for us and we are getting much better treatment than we ever would get over there.”⁵⁷ Another story relates to a POW’s love for his new home. Simply stated, the POW said, “America ist shine!” (America is beautiful!) and ‘Deutschland is kaput!’ (Germany is finished!).⁵⁸ One might imagine that many POWs wished to immigrate to this area. In fact, some tried to do so.

In order to immigrate, each POW had to have a sponsor, and many of them were offered jobs by the American farmers and businessmen who had employed them while they were prisoners, thus enabling them to obtain visas to return. Whether or not they had job offers, those POWs who did immigrate apparently had such fond memories of the camp life that they settled within a few miles of the camps in which they had been held, although the necessity of working for a sponsor who was most likely to have been located in the area of the former prison camp may have played a major role in the choice of a home.⁵⁹

⁵⁵ Steckler.

⁵⁶ Betty Cowley, *Stalag Wisconsin: Insider WW II Prisoner-of-War Camps*, (Oregon, Wisconsin: Badger Books, 2002), 44.

⁵⁷ “Prisoners Must be Well Fed, Says Custodian at City Dump; Refuse Gives Him Good Clue,” *The Fond du Lac Commonwealth Reporter*, July 11, 1944, also quoted in Cowley, 114.

⁵⁸ Cowley, 226

⁵⁹ Steckler.

All told, some 30,000 Germans immigrated to the United States following the war.⁶⁰ The number of these immigrants who were former POWs is unclear. Of course many of these people had not been soldiers at all, much less POWs, for they were “war brides” brought back by returning GIs.⁶¹

The ideas codified as rules for treatment of prisoners by the Geneva Conventions had an impact upon POW life within the U.S. and in Fond du Lac. Many POWs were eager to return to a land and people that had given them an education, employment and acceptance, while return to the privations and unemployment of a war-torn Germany could not have been very attractive for those without families. For some Germans, “home” no longer existed in any meaningful sense, for their communities had been assigned to Poland or the Soviet Union, and the returning soldiers would not have been welcome and might have faced further incarceration to assist in post-war reconstruction. In other parts of East Central Europe like Czechoslovakia, ethnic German minorities were being expelled. On the other hand, the experience that those incarcerated in the POW camps had undergone, including those in Fond du Lac County, had been humane, and POWs and Americans associated with them all prospered because of it.

Remarkably, opposing sides in a massive, destructive war had been able to work together peacefully. As one man who had contact with the prisoners said, “even though our countries were at war, we could put that aside and think of each other as fellow human beings.”⁶² To be sure, Fond du Lac farmers and canneries benefited from POW labor, but the POWs surely also benefited from the fair treatment, education and exposure to ideas of American democracy that they had received.

⁶⁰ Steckler.

⁶¹ The story of one such prisoner, Kurt Pechmann, was related fifty years later in by Tim Norris, “Prisoner in a Free Land,” *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel*, October 1, 1995. The story emphasized the value of fair and decent treatment of prisoners in helping to rebuild Germany. Pechmann returned to Germany February 4, 1946, married a German woman, and immigrated to Wisconsin in 1952.

⁶² Cowley, 145.