OUR STATE

By William F. Raney

We of Outagamie County join with the other counties of the state in congratulating Wisconsin on the completion of her first century. The Act of Congress admitting Wisconsin to the Union was approved by President Polk, May 29, 1848; on June 7, Nelson Dewey, a Democrat of Grant County, took the oath of office and became the first governor.

FIRST PEOPLES

No one knows how long the Indians had occupied Wisconsin before 1848. Jean Nicolet, the first European to see it, came in 1634. For about 200 years after his short visit, it was permitted to the Indians to live and fight in Wisconsin much as they pleased. Their life was, of course, modified by the use of firearms and other goods of European origin, and to buy what they needed they were obliged to devote themselves unremittingly to the pursuit of fur-bearing animals.

At Green Bay a small French-speaking community, closely bound up with the Indian trade, came into existence. In 1820, when it was about to be submerged in an English-speaking flood, this French-Canadian community is believed to have numbered about 50 families; that is, probably, some 250 or 300 persons. There was a similar community, but much smaller, at Prairie du Chien; some scattered Frenchmen lived elsewhere alone or among the Indians. There are some place names of French origin in Wisconsin today, but the “Wisconsin Creoles” as Thwaites once called them, were not numerous enough to leave an appreciable impress on the Wisconsin of today. The office of the American Fur Company at Green Bay was closed in 1845, and this date may be taken to mark the end of the fur trade in eastern and southern Wisconsin.

Before Wisconsin could become an English-speaking community, the Indians must be removed or gathered into reservations. The various tribes were treated by the federal government as having some
of the characteristics of independent nations. They were assigned definite boundaries; then, when the white men needed their lands, they were induced or compelled to cede their holdings to the federal government. The treaties of cession by which Wisconsin ceased to be Indian property numbered 11; the first was in 1829, the last, in 1848. It was October 18, 1848, about four and one-half months after Nelson Dewey first took the oath of office, that the Indians—the Menominee, in this case—gave up the last of their lands and agreed to remove to a reservation.

GEOGRAPHICAL ORGANIZATION

Wisconsin belonged to the famous Northwest Territory. In 1800, it became a part of Indiana Territory. It belonged to Illinois Territory from 1809 to 1818, and to Michigan Territory from 1818 to 1836. Only the last of these relationships had much importance. It was while Wisconsin was a part of Michigan Territory that five federal treaties with the Indians were negotiated, treaties which made it possible to begin the survey of the land and open it up to settlement by English-speaking farmers. The part of Michigan Territory lying west of Lake Michigan was divided into counties and county governments were set up. Brown and Crawford counties date from 1818, and are thus older than any other counties; older than the state of Wisconsin itself. In this period, also, those west of Lake Michigan held elections to choose men to represent them in the legislative council of Michigan Territory. This region west of the lake became Wisconsin Territory in 1836, and during the next twelve years the flood of English-speaking Yankees, most of them farmers, spread over the eastern and southern part of the future state. Either in the Michigan or the Wisconsin territorial period, many of the elements of community life, such as banks, churches and political parties, had their beginnings. By the time Wisconsin became a state, 29 of the present counties were in existence.

IMMIGRATION

The population of Wisconsin in 1850 was 305,000. Two years earlier, when
the constitution was written and Wisconsin entered the Union, it was probably considerably below 300,000—less than one-tenth of what it is today. Wisconsin was later to become famous as the home of immigrants from many European countries. But settlement up to 1848 was chiefly from New York State and New England. To these Yankees we owe the constitution and the establishment of our institutions. That is why so many details of Wisconsin government trace their origin back to New England, and beyond that, to England. The first contributions of the Germans and others from the continent of Europe were to economic life and to elements of culture other than government. These Europeans came, moreover, intending to be genuine Americans; they accepted the government they found here as something good, something that did not need to be changed.

From 1850 to 1930, the population of Wisconsin increased by something over 300,000 a decade. It had passed one million by 1870 and two by 1900. In the decade ending in 1940 the increase was just under 200,000; the official figure for that year was 3,137,587. A hundred years ago practically all the white population lived south and east of the Fox and Wisconsin rivers. By 1860 settlement had flowed beyond the rivers and could be bounded on the north, roughly, by a line across the state from Green Bay to Hudson, sagging southward in the middle. Beyond this was the region known as northern Wisconsin, where for a long time the chief industry was pine lumbering. In 1860 this land, having only some 31,000 people, was still comparatively empty. Yet by 1920 northern Wisconsin had come to have 702,000 inhabitants; by 1940, 757,000, or about one-fourth of the population of the state. The other principal change indicated by population statistics has been the development of industrial areas. Milwaukee County alone now has more than one-fourth of the population of the state. It is interesting to note, also, that the five counties in the valley of the lower Fox, that is, Fond du Lac, Calumet, Winnebago, Outagamie and Brown, taken together, have for several decades contained just about one-tenth of the people of Wisconsin. The United States Census classifies as urban those who live in communities with more than 2,500 people. The population of Wisconsin is now about 56 per cent urban and 44 per cent rural.

POLITICS

The political history of the state began with the rivalry between the Democrats and the Whigs in the territorial period. Many of the settlers in the southwestern lead-mining district were Southerners and Democrats. Among the Yankees

Monument at Menasha commemorating Nicolet's Mission Among Indians in 1634

who were filling up the eastern side of the state, the Whigs were in the majority. The first governor of the state was a Democrat, the second a Whig and the third, William A. Barstow, was a Democrat. In 1854, while Barstow was governor, the Republican Party was born. It has been in control of the state most of the time since 1856. Since that date there have been three Democratic governors, William R. Taylor (1874-1876), George W. Peck (1891-1895) and Albert G. Schmedeman (1933-1935). Philip F. La Follette was a Republican governor before Schmedeman; afterwards, as leader of the Progressive Party, he was governor for
four years (1935-1939). In other words, since 1856, the Republicans have held sway for 80 years, the Democrats for eight and the Progressives for four. In 1856, John C. Fremont ran as the first Republican candidate for President. From that time on through 1928, the Republicans carried the state at all presidential elections except two: that of 1892 when Cleveland defeated Harrison by a very small margin; that of 1912 when Woodrow Wilson won out because the Republican vote was divided between Taft and Theodore Roosevelt. Franklin D. Roosevelt carried the state in 1932, 1936 and 1940; the Republicans under Dewey had a majority in the election of 1944.

One should not hastily assume, however, because of the domination of the state by the Republican Party for so long that the Democratic Party was of small importance. The presidential elections, the membership in the state legislature and the make-up of the Wisconsin delegation to the federal Congress, all indicate, at least until about 1920, that from 35 to 45 per cent of Wisconsin voters normally preferred the Democratic Party. We are so accustomed nowadays to venerating Abraham Lincoln that it comes almost as a shock to find that over 40 per cent of Wisconsin people voted for Stephen A. Douglas in 1860; 44 per cent for McClellan in 1864. Lincoln failed to carry Outagamie County in either election.

Without doubt Robert M. La Follette is the greatest political figure that has yet appeared in the history of the state. By the time he reached mid-career he was known throughout the nation as a champion of the common man against the undue influence in government of men of great wealth. As governor (1901-1906) he carried out reforms pretty generally opposed by capitalists and big business. During the last 19 years of his life he was in the United States Senate. In 1911 and 1912 he was a leader in the Progressive movement, and he hoped for a time to receive Republican nomination for the presidency; but the party split and Theo-
dore Roosevelt was chosen to lead the insurgents. When the first World War came La Follette maintained that war should be undertaken only to repel actual invasion and after a popular referendum; during the war, in the face of great unpopularity and abuse, he showed a magnificent courage. Until 1924 he always remained within the Republican Party. In that year, however, he became an independent candidate for the presidency. Though he received one-sixth of the votes cast in the whole nation, he carried only Wisconsin. The Wisconsin legislature was in session when he died, in June, 1925; it immediately named him one of "Wisconsin's immortals" by providing that a likeness of him should be placed in Statuary Hall in Washington, D. C. The record of the legislation he secured or advocated is too long to be discussed here. To the preservation and growth of the democratic ideal in America he made a valuable and lasting contribution.

AGRICULTURE

Economic history tells the story of how people make their living and satisfy their wants; the economic history of Wisconsin is as important and interesting as the political. The fur trade was fading out when Wisconsin became a state, and scarcely touched at all the lives of the incoming Americans, most of whom were intent on farm-making. Agriculture began in most localities with the raising of wheat, and for a time Wisconsin was one of the great wheat producing states of the nation. It was quite natural therefore that a resident of Wisconsin, John F. Appleby, should invent the knotter, the most essential part of the machine to bind grain. For a time, too, there were many flour mills: Appleton had six in 1880. By this date, however, the yield of wheat was diminishing in many areas, and the trend was beginning toward a more varied and self-perpetuating agriculture. The greatest prophet of the new era was a country journalist, William D. Hoard, who was active in urging new methods from about 1870. He started the famous weekly paper, Hoard's Dairymen, in 1885; he became governor of the state in 1889, and lived on to 1916 to see the marvelous triumph of his ideas. The Agricultural College of the University of Wisconsin has since the eighteen eighties been an important factor in helping the farmers of the state toward better agriculture. Today, the cattle outnumber the people in Wisconsin and determine the character of the farming more than any other one factor. Butter, cheese and other milk products rank high among the manufactures of the state. Tobacco, peas for canning and many other crops are raised to be sure, but nothing else approaches dairying in importance.

TRANSPORTATION

The history of transportation in Wisconsin began with the canoes of Indians and fur traders along our lakes and rivers. The farms of the English-speaking settlers had to be linked with the outside world, and a network of roads gradually covered the state; but not much could be said for their quality until after 1900. Canals were constructed to make possible the navigation of the lower Fox. Those at Appleton
and Kaukauna were built between 1849 and 1853. The first operating railroad in the state ran westward from Milwaukee to Waukesha and began service in 1851. By 1890 there were 5,500 miles of railroad in the state. There was a peak of about 7,700 miles in 1916; at present about 7,000 miles are operated. Outagamie County got its first railroad in 1861 when the North Western extended its line northward from Oshkosh and Neenah.

The railway system was almost complete before Wisconsin seriously undertook the improvement and construction of highways for automobile traffic. Roads were originally in charge of counties and towns, and a law of 1907 (the County Aid law) encouraged the local governments to tax and spend for road building. It was contrary to the state constitution to use state funds for works of internal improvement, but this prohibition was removed by an amendment in 1908. After that the state spent much on roads. The Highway Commission was set up in 1911, and in 1916 federal aid to the states began. The investment in Wisconsin highways, as long ago as 1931, exceeded the cost of all the railroads in the state. The history of air transport is just beginning.

TIMBER RESOURCES

The harvesting and marketing of its timber resources, especially the pine, was a mighty episode in the history of Wisconsin. It began in a small way soon after 1840, but its large-scale development came after the Civil War, and the greatest productivity fell about the turn of the century. The exploitation was ruthless, wasteful and very rapid. Many men gained great wealth in the process, but for the most part the initial cutting left behind a ruined countryside, the ghastly cutover land. The pine along Lake Michigan southward from Door County was gone by 1875, and one by one the regions to the west were denuded. By 1914 the great drives of logs down the Menominee, the Chippewa and the other lumbering streams belonged to history. Gleaning of second growth and the cutting of the hardwoods have continued down to our time, but the methods are different and the glamour of the nineteenth century has departed forever.

MANUFACTURING

Every 10 years the federal government, along with other matters in the census, gives the facts about manufacturing. These successive cross-sections show a constant shifting in the relative position of the various industries. In 1879 (Census of 1880), to go no further back, flour and gristmill products were first among the manufactures of Wisconsin and lumber and timber were second. These positions have an obvious relation to what has been said about agriculture and pine lumbering. At the next three censuses (1890 to 1910) lumber and timber stood first. By 1920 butter, cheese and condensed milk, taken together, had come to hold first place, with foundry and machine shop products second. Motor vehicles and meat packing, both valued at more than $100,000,000, stood third and fourth. In 1929 motor vehicles were in the lead, with butter, cheese and condensed milk a close second. Paper and wood pulp, which had stood eighth in 1909, had by 1929 reached fourth place.

The last available federal census is that of 1940, giving the figures for the year 1939. In a list of more than a hundred Wisconsin products there were 34 valued at more than ten million dollars each. The leaders were as follows: agricultural products including butter, cheese, condensed milk, special dairy products, $182,000,000; motor vehicles, bodies, parts and accessories, $162,000,000; paper and pulp, $128,000,000; wholesale meat packing, $80,000,000; tractors, $68,000,000; malt liquors, $53,000,000.

The total value of manufactures in Wisconsin in 1939 was $1,604,000,000. Only those who scan the long list given in the Census Reports can realize how diversified are the industries of Wiscon-
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Wisconsin, of course, does not live by herself; she is part of the nation and of the civilized world. Many events affect her which she has no part in causing, as, for example all the wars in which the United States has participated from the Mexican War to the present. The railroad was invented in England, the internal combustion engine in Germany: Wisconsin uses them both. There are contributions to medical science from England, France, Germany and many other lands of which every physician avails himself constantly. Our schools, colleges and universities teach the common heritage of all the states in the union and of many foreign lands. The literature that we read knows no state or national boundaries. In the fields of literature, learning and the arts, the words "state history" have little meaning. It should be said also, however, that while Wisconsin receives and profits, she gives something in return. In Wisconsin inventions and scientific discoveries have been made that benefit the world and will long continue to do so. One thinks at once of the Babcock milk test and of the work on vitamins at the University of Wisconsin. The state has had writers of distinction in literature and learning; for example, Edna Ferber and Frederick Jackson Turner.

Outagamie County was established by act of the legislature in 1851. The state is the framework within which the county has existed from the beginning. County government operates under the state con-
stitution and the state laws which pertain to it. The people in this as in other counties are constantly protected and served by the state and its many departments. This review of state history, brief as it is, shows how life goes on in Outagamie County, and why it is as it is. National history, too, throws light on every locality. State history illuminates and gives meaning to the details of county history which make up most of this volume. These details are not peculiar to this county, but are repeated over and over again in other parts of the state and nation. They are, in fact, evidences of the great movements that have created American civilization and the life that we now enjoy.