HISTORY OF APPLETON

The Fox River Valley was the home of several Indian tribes before it was settled by white men. It is rich in Indian lore and names. Jean Nicolet explored this region in 1634 and his account of the beauty and richness of the country enticed other explorers, missionaries, and settlers. In 1673 Joliet and Marquette traveled up the Fox River in route to their discovery of the Mississippi River. The Menominee Indians ceded Outagamie County to the U.S. government in the treaty of 1831, which in turn disposed the land to speculators and settlers.

The first settler in Appleton, Hippolyte Grignon, built his home, White Heron, at the head of the grand chute of the Fox River in 1835. His home served as inn and trading post.

In 1847 Lawrence Institute received its charter from the Territorial Legislature after the Honorable Amos A. Lawrence made a contribution to the Wisconsin Methodist Episcopal Conference in the amount of $10,000, contingent upon the Methodist Church raising a similar amount. The Reverend W. H. Sampson collected a sum matching that donated by Amos Lawrence and a committee consisting of Colonel H. L. Blood, Mr. George E. H. Day and Reverend Reeder Smith set out to find a suitable location. The college was to be situated on the Fox River between Lake Winnebago and Green Bay on land owned by Amos Lawrence. Building operations began in 1848 and the college was surveyed by Reverend W. H. Sampson, Henry Blood and Joel S. Wright. A lodging house for the college workers was established by J. F. Johnston which also served as hospital, church, Sunday School, post office, and social center. Other early settlers were Mr. J. S. Therber, Colonel Blood, and Reverend A. B. Randall.
The Honorable Samuel Appleton, a relative of Mr. Lawrence, became interested in the college and gave $10,000 for a library fund to be used for the purchase of books providing superior educational advantages. In grateful appreciation of this generous act, the name Appleton was given to the City.

The Appleton Village Plat was laid out in 1848 by Elder Sampson, Reeder Smith, Joel S. Wright, and Henry Blood. Within a year, W. S. Warner had set up the first dry goods store, and by 1850 there were 619 people. On either side of Appleton two other villages were growing; Lawesburg, east of the present Union Street, and Grand Chute, west of Division Street. In 1853 the Villages of Appleton, Lawesburg, and Grand Chute incorporated with J. F. Johnston as President. Other Village Officers were James M. Phinney, Clerk; M. M. Egglestone, Treasurer; James Gilmore, Assessor; E. D. Finney, Marshall; Waite Cross, W. H. Sampson, Sam Ryan, Jr., George Lamphere, A. B. Brown, and C. E. Bennett, Trustees.

In 1857 the Village of Appleton incorporated as a City with a population of 2,000. The first City Officers were Amos Storey, Mayor; Fred Packard, Clerk; Anson Ballard, Attorney; C. E. Bennett, Treasurer; James Gilmore, Assessor; Chauncy Foot, Surveyor; Jackson Tibbets, Street Commissioner; W. H. Sampson, J. G. Brownell, Aldermen for the First Ward; R. C. Bull, E. C. Goff, Aldermen for the Second Ward; B. F. Perry, D. H. Bowen, Aldermen for the Third Ward.

A sawmill and wing dam built by T. P. Bingham began the tremendous industrialization of the Fox River in 1849. The first paper mill began in 1853 by C. P. Richmond. By 1854 Appleton had two
flour mills, a paper mill, four sawmills, two lath mills, one planing mill, two sash and door factories, an edge tool factory and a chair factory.

The City's first newspaper, the Crescent, established in 1853 by Ryan and Company brought the news to the people and income to the City. Another newspaper entered into rivalry with the Crescent in 1858. Called the Post, it presented a Republican view point where the Crescent presented the Democratic view. The Post, published by Pomeroy and Baker, became the official newspaper of the City. Two additional newspapers were established in 1870, The Times, published by J. N. Stone, and the Appleton Volksfreund published by Erb, Schindelmeisser and Company. The Volksfreund was probably the most widely read German newspaper in the State.

In 1856 the steamboat "Aquila", a sternwheeler, made its trip from Milwaukee to Green Bay passing through Appleton with the aid of a system of locks built by the Fox and Wisconsin Improvement Company. This company was sold to a new corporation, the Green Bay and Mississippi Canal Company in 1866, which in turn sold the locks and dams to the U.S. Government in 1872. The steamboat era was brief and colorful, but transportation changed for the City when the Chicago & Northwestern Railway came in 1861. Additional railways came in the early 70's, the Green Bay and Lake Pepin, the Wisconsin Central, and the Milwaukee, Lake Shore and Western. In 1880 the Menasha and Appleton was established which was subsequently taken over by the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul Company in 1893.

The first Jewish congregation was started in 1874. Services were held above Heckert's Saloon on College Avenue until a synagogue
was built on the southeast corner of Durkee and Harris Streets. Rabbi Weiss, founder of the synagogue, was also the father of Harry Houdini (Erich Weiss), a famous escape artist. A nationally known writer, Edna Ferber, was also a member of the congregation.

Appleton was well ahead of the times when Alfred Galpin put together his own telephone in 1877 connecting his bank and residence. L. N. Benoit, a druggist, immediately saw the possibilities and installed several phones in his store. He connected his phones with the offices of several Appleton physicians, helping Appleton to become the only Wisconsin City other than Milwaukee to have such an extensive service. In 1878, Benoit had a switchboard serving 25 phones. His exchange was purchased by the Wisconsin Telephone Company upon his death in 1881.

Other great strides occurred in the 70's. George MacMillan brought gas for illumination and cooking to Appleton and a plant for the manufacture of artificial gas was begun by S. C. Carpenter in June of 1877. This brought a glow to the City with the first gas street lighting system. This was only the beginning of brighter things to come. A group of businessmen, who were far ahead of their time, put their money and faith into the world's first hydro-electric central station. H. E. Rogers, A. L. Smith, H. D. Smith, and Charles Beveridge won their gamble on the night of September 30, 1882. On that night the Roger's mill, the Vulcan Paper Company, and the Roger's home (now called Hearthstone) glowed with new electric light, each directly connected to the generator. It was a crude system having to be watched constantly to control the rate of water flowing through it, for if the rate was diminishing the lights would dim.
Just four years later the City was caught up in the wheel of progress once again. The Appleton Electric Street Railway was incorporated by Joseph E. Harriman, a real estate dealer and Outagamie County Judge; F. W. Harriman a lawyer; and N. B. Clark, a wealthy farmer. George Kreiss laid the ground work in 1886 and the trolleys moved swiftly across town from State and Prospect Streets east to the cemetery at the east end of Pacific Street where they were turned around by hand. A line also ran to Lake Winnebago on Oneida Street. Appleton was connected to Neenah-Menasha by the Interurban service in 1898, and to Kaukauna in 1900. An "automobile craze" occurred in 1903 with the formation of various clubs promoting use and ownership. The Fox River Bus Company, owned by Olaf Lundquist, began its Bennett-Lawe Street loop in 1924. As these two means of transportation became widely used in the 1930's, the Electric Street Railway ended.

The C. J. Pettibone Store was established in Appleton in 1860. It was one in a group of chain stores which were one of the first in the country.

Appleton was active in the War Between the States, with memorable people such as Professor Henry Pomeroy, Captain Hugh Pomeroy, Theodore Conkey, Captain Welcome Hyde, and Captain J. H. Marston serving the Union.

The public park system began in 1881 with the purchase of an eight acre tract off College Avenue. This land became City Park. Before this date, gatherings and picnics occurred at privately owned parks such as Pierce's Woods, Reeder Smith's ravine, and Telulah. Telulah was by far the most popular, boasting of a sulfur spring, boat landing and harness race track.
The City's contract with the Appleton Water Works Company expired in 1901, at which time a legal battle began. It remained unsolved for thirty years involving fifty-eight different court actions, proceedings, and appeals, reaching to the Supreme Court.

The City Council moved into new Council Chambers located above the City Library in 1900. This was probably the first public building the City built. Its dedication was well celebrated with two ceremonies, one in the afternoon and one in the evening.

The first Municipal Court, later known as Outagamie County Court, was established with Thomas H. Ryan as the first judge. Among Judge Ryan's accomplishments is a written history of Outagamie County.

Appleton was honored by a visit from President W. H. Taft on October 26, 1911. The City was decorated with flags and buntings. A processional with local, state and national dignitaries was conducted. The President addressed the crowd at Lawrence Memorial Chapel. The day had been a great success.

In the same year, Fred Felix Wettengel brought the first airplane to Appleton when he guaranteed aviator Rogers $2,000 for a 15 minute exhibition flight. Upon meeting the agreement, Rogers gave several people short rides.

College Avenue was electrically lit in 1912. The Avenue business men shared the expense of lighting from 7:30 til 9:30 during the summer, and 5:30 until 9:30 during the winter. Saturday nights were an exception in that the lights were left on until 11:00. Within the same year, the City experienced a blackout. The central source of electric power was flooded on the night of
January 9. An ice jam caused the water level to rise. About 100 men set out to break up the jam working day and night in -22° F weather. Light and power was returned to the City in a matter of days.

Appleton has grown steadily since Hippolyte Grignon first built his home here. The earliest settlers came from New England. Among them were well educated people who secured the quality of Lawrence Institute. The rapids of the Fox River proved to have great potential. Their power was harnessed and used in mills and factories. Other workers came later, largely from Germany and Holland. The population grew rapidly. In 1850 the census was 619, and by the time the City incorporated in 1857 it had risen to 2,000. This doubling process continued through 1880. Growth continued to be steady but did not take such great bounds. The present estimate is 61,414, thirty times that of the City's original population.