GOVERNMENT

By Albert W. Tetzlaff

County Government

While Wisconsin rounds out a century of statehood in 1948, Manitowoc county, as a political unit, is in reality older than the state. Originally a part of Brown county, it was constituted, Dec. 7, 1836, as a separate county soon after Wisconsin became a territory. The county seat was fixed at Manitowoc Rapids, but it was not organized for "all purposes of county government" until December, 1838, and it remained attached to Brown county for judicial purposes until 1848.

The date for the first election was set for the first Monday in March, 1839. The first officers chosen were as follows: County commissioners, Horace Conroe, J. G. Conroe and J. Rigby; assessor, O. C. Hubbard; register of deeds, J. W. Conroe; collector, Peter Johnston. The county commissioners were elected at large. They corresponded to the present county board; the collector corresponded to the present county treasurer. The commissioners chose the county clerk. The other officers—district attorney, clerk of court, sheriff, and county judge—were not necessary until the county was organized judicially.

For ten years the county board was composed of three members, one retiring annually. The main business before the board was the laying out of roads and school districts, and the appointment of constables and minor officials. The last board under this system was elected in 1848.

Allowed to Choose

In the years immediately prior to 1848 differences of opinion regarding county government existed in certain parts of the state. The early settlers who poured into the southern part of the state, when lead was discovered, were southerners who preferred the commission form of government. The rest of the state was settled mostly by people from New York and New England who preferred the township supervisor plan. So we find that in 1842 a law was passed permitting counties to choose the kind of government they preferred.

When Wisconsin was admitted to statehood in 1848, the constitution set a new pattern for county government. County officials, who, prior to the time, had been appointed or elected annually, were now to hold office for two years, and the township county board system was not made compulsory, by a provision of the state constitution (Article IV, Section 23), which provided that "the legislature shall establish but one system of town and county government, which shall be as nearly uniform as possible." At this time, also, Manitowoc county was separated judicially from Brown county. The first biennial election of county officers took place in the fall of 1848.

In 1848 Manitowoc county was organized into four townships: Manitowoc, Manitowoc Rapids, Two Rivers, and Meeme. The first session of the county board, which consisted of Andrew J. Vieau of Manitowoc, John Stewart of Two Rivers, Charles McAllister of Manitowoc Rapids,
and T. Cunningham of Meeme, was held in June, 1849.

Law Passed in 1861

In spite of the "uniformity clause" of the constitution, different views concerning local government persisted, and for many years Wisconsin became a battleground for conflicting ideas. In some areas demand arose for the restoration of the commission form. In answer to this demand a law was passed March 28, 1861, which required the county boards to elect three commissioners from assembly districts, the number to be increased with the growth of population. Manitowoc county complied, and the following constituted the first board under this law: First district, John Carey; second district, Lyman Emerson; third district, Nels Sorensen. Mr. Emerson was elected president of the first board. An amendment to the county supervisor law provided for a supervisor-at-large, and J. E. Eggers was chosen to serve in this capacity. Later, by another amendment to the county supervisor law, three additional members were added. These were Michael Gallogly, Thomas Mohr and Louis Koehnke, making a seven-member county board.

This system remained in effect until the law was repealed, when the supreme court ruled that it violated the "uniformity clause" of the constitution. By 1870, the present supervisor plan, whereby each town, incorporated village and city ward is represented by a supervisor on the county board, had been re-established throughout the state. Over the years as the population increased new towns have been set up, village and cities have been incorporated, until today we have eighteen towns, two incorporated villages, and three cities with seven, eight, and three wards respectively, making a total of thirty-eight members on our present county board. This plan, while uniform in the-

ory is far from uniform in practice. Some supervisors represent only a small number, while in densely populated areas one supervisor sometimes represents many thousands.

New Courthouse in 1857

In the early days the only county-owned buildings were the courthouse and the jail in Manitowoc Rapids. Elections were usually held in privately owned homes, and officers were permitted to hold their offices in their own homes. The courthouse was built in 1840, and the jail in 1849. These were destroyed by fire in 1852, but fortunately the records were saved. The fire, together with the fact that the village of Manitowoc was growing more rapidly than Manitowoc Rapids, led to an agitation for the removal of the county seat to Manitowoc. This was voted in 1853 and a new courthouse was finally constructed in 1857.

About this time the county board adopted the county poor farm system, which continued in use for over ten years, when the township system of maintenance went into effect. The increase in population and advances in social and economic conditions brought demands for more and more governmental services. In the 1860s the first county superintendent of schools was elected. Later, a county asylum for the care of insane patients was voted, and opened for use in 1885, the late William Rahr being one of the chief leaders in urging its construction. A new county jail was erected in the early 90s and the courthouse remodeled. A municipal court was established in 1895. In 1906 the present new courthouse was erected.

Municipal Government

In the years following other county institutions were established and new county offices
were created in answer to public demands and needs. Thus, today we have a county rural normal school for the training of teachers; a sanatorium for the care of tubercular patients; a large county farm in connection with our present mental hospital; a county fair grounds and buildings; and a large county highway department headed by a county highway commissioner. Among the new offices established in more recent years are the county agent, 4-H club and home demonstration agents, county nurse, county service officer, probation officer, welfare departments, tax listing, police radio, and county physician. These offices and institutions were created by legislation which also provided for special committees, boards, and commissions to operate and administer them.

Our county government has become more and more complex and now performs many functions undreamed of in the early days. So rapid has been the growth in services demanded that many students of government feel the structure of county government established a hundred years ago does not adequately meet today's conditions. They believe that a uniform system of government in all counties is not desirable or possible, except in theory. They feel that the highly urbanized and industrial counties require a form of government different from that of the distinctly rural and more sparsely settled counties; they want the system liberalized to allow counties to choose a form of government suited to local conditions.

Law Ruled Invalid

Remedial action to bring about modernization of county government will require careful study and attention. In an attempt to improve the situation, a law was passed in 1921 permitting counties again to accept the commission form of government with
from three to nine commissioners, depending upon the population. However, before this plan was widely adopted, the law was declared unconstitutional because it violated the "uniformity clause." Attempts have been made to amend the constitution, but a constitutional amendment must be favorably voted upon by two consecutive legislatures. Until now, attempts to do this have proved unsuccessful.

Meanwhile study and research continues in an effort to streamline and modernize our present set-up. It will be interesting to see what changes the years ahead will bring forth, for undoubtedly we are still in the incubation stage of county government.

City Government

Since the county was organized, five municipalities have set up their own municipal government. Three of them have now become cities, and two have been incorporated as villages. Some of the important villages of pioneer times have ceased to be important or have ceased to exist.

Manitowoc

The present city of Manitowoc was settled in 1836. It remained an unincorporated village until March 6, 1851, when a village charter was issued. The first village president was George Reed. The village upon being incorporated was governed by a board of trustees and was represented on the county board by supervisors from the first and second wards of that period. On March 12, 1870, the village was incorporated as a city. Peter Johnson was the first mayor. He and the aldermen from the four wards governed the city. By 1900, the city had seven wards, the number we now have in 1948. There has been some agitation to increase the wards to fourteen in order that more equal county board representation with the rest of the county population might be possible.

Two Rivers

The first entries of land on the present site of Two Rivers were made Sept. 10, 1835. On March 31, 1858, a village charter incorporating the village of Two Rivers was granted. H. C. Hamilton was mayor, with the village represented on the county board by supervisors from the first and second wards. A city charter was granted on March 18, 1878. The city's county board representatives came from the five wards until 1930, when the city was organized on the eight ward plan, which it maintains in 1948.

The following men served as mayor of Two Rivers: Michael Maloy, 1878-1880; W. F. Nash, 1880-1881; Michael Maloy, 1881-1882; Andrew Baetz, 1882-1884; William Hurst, 1884-1886; B. C. Wilkins, 1886-1890; B. T. Richter, 1890-1891; R. E. Mueller, 1891-1893; J. E. Hamilton, 1893-1895; William Luebke, 1895-1896; Louis Zander, 1896-1897; Peter Gagnon, 1897-1901; Peter Schroeder, 1901-1905; Dr. J. R. Currans, 1905-1911; Conrad Baetz, 1911-1917; Dr. J. R. Currans, 1917-1921, and H. C. Gowran, 1921-1925.

An ordinance had been adopted early in 1897 making the term of mayor two years instead of one.

On April 18, 1924, an election was held on the question of adopting the city-manager form of government. The vote proved favorable. On May 18, 1925, the city council appointed Richard Biehl as city manager, the office becoming effective on June 1, 1925. Succeeding Biehl, who served from June 1, 1925, to June 15, 1928, were Earl J. Donnelly, June 20, 1928, to Oct. 12, 1940: Harry W. Knight, Jan. 1, 1941, to April 21, 1942; and the present city manager, John P. Hoffman, whose term began on April 22, 1942.

Kiel

Situated in the southwestern
part of Manitowoc county, Kiel has had a steady growth since its first settlement in the early 1850s. Incorporated on June 12, 1892, with Charles Heins as its first mayor, it was represented on the county board by one supervisor until it became a city on Dec. 15, 1920. Since then, Kiel has had five supervisors—three of them on the Manitowoc county board and two on the Calumet county board.

Reeds ville-Valders

Reeds ville, named in honor of Judge George Reed, who owned the present site of the village, began in 1854. It was locally known for years as Mud Creek from the small creek flowing through it. Incorporated on Jan. 29, 1892, with W. H. Noble as its first president, it has always had only one supervisor to represent it on the county board.

The last village incorporated in Manitowoc county, located between the towns of Liberty and Cato, is Valders. With the building of the Soo line, the village was platted in 1896 and the order of incorporation issued by the circuit judge of Manitowoc county on Nov. 7, 1919. In the first village election, held on Jan. 13, 1920, William F. Christel was elected as the first president. Since its incorporation, the village has been represented on the county board by one supervisor.

There are about 30 unincorporated villages and hamlets within the county. They do not have a separate municipal government of their own, but are governed by the laws of the township in which they are situated.