

SHEBOYGAN'S CENTURY OF PROGRESS

By WALTER J. PFISTER

A HUGE forest of gloomy pines at the mouth of a winding river and on the shores of a mighty lake. Thin spirals of smoke issuing from the campfires of the Pottawatomie Indians as they sat in front of their tepees. Dense wilderness, with a few almost impenetrable trails. Bark canoes and crudely built rafts as the only means of transportation and convoy.

That was what there was to be seen at the present site of Sheboygan before the white man came to settle these shores.

Today beautiful homes, lawns, streets and parks, large factories and sturdy commercial and public buildings have transplanted the wilderness and tepees. A network of expansive highways and both steam and electric roads now connect this same area with the world. Huge lake steamers and other modern craft now ply the waters of the same winding river that once knew only canoe and raft. Airplanes fly overhead, and the civilization of the twentieth century is with us in its entirety.

The interlude between the two foregoing word pictures was a long and eventful one. It is replete with dates of historic importance but the one of principal importance during the week of Sheboygan's Centennial and Homecoming program is that of 1834.

100 YEARS OF PROGRESS

While it is true that white men had visited this area many years before and that a definite start towards some sort of a community had been made before the year of 1834, it was just one hundred years ago that this same site became duly recognized as a definite settlement in a wild and sparsely settled territory.

Historically speaking, Sheboygan's march of progress is best divided into four eras—the pioneer period, which dated from prehistoric days to 1846 when Sheboygan received its charter; the era of commercial and civic growth as a village until 1868; the period of industrial boom which had its origin in the manufacture of furniture and which extended to 1885; the era of electricity, modern transportation, communication and civilization in which we are still living and to which we are adding new marvels each year.

Without doubt the first white man to view the site of Sheboygan was Jean Nicolet in 1635 on his way south from Green Bay. With his sturdy Huron braves in large birch-bark canoes, he skirted the shores of Lake Michigan during the course of that noted exploration conducted by Nicolet at the order of Samuel de Champlain, governor of new France, and in so doing silently glided past that huge gloomy forest which was destined to become a leading city of Wisconsin.

Historians claim that eight years later Sieur Louis Joliet and James Marquette, returning from Green Bay after dis-

covery of the Upper Mississippi river, also passed the site. Beyond doubt many others—adventurers, fur traders, soldiers and priests—visited the same territory, but their explorations were not recorded.

FIRST KNOWN LANDING

The first known landing at the site of Sheboygan to be recorded is that of Missionary Father St. Cosme, a native of Quebec, who came upon a Pottawatomie Indian village here in 1699.

These Indians, of a nomadic race, later fled to escape the Chippewas and the Sioux who warred continually for the Sheboygan county territory during the latter part of the eighteenth and early part of the nineteenth century. So long and bitter was the two-hundred-year war between the latter two tribes that it was not settled, according to the History of Wisconsin, until the government called the rival chieftains to a parley, and Chief Hole-In-The-Day of the Chippewas claimed the Sheboygan territory "by right of conquest." And during the greater part of the war the area destined to be Sheboygan remained just wilderness.

The first white settler to visit the site of Sheboygan was William Farnsworth, who was to be one of the area's foremost pioneers. He visited here in 1814, left for several years, and then returned in 1818, the same year that Governor Cass, chief executive of the Michigan territory, landed here with a fleet of canoes.

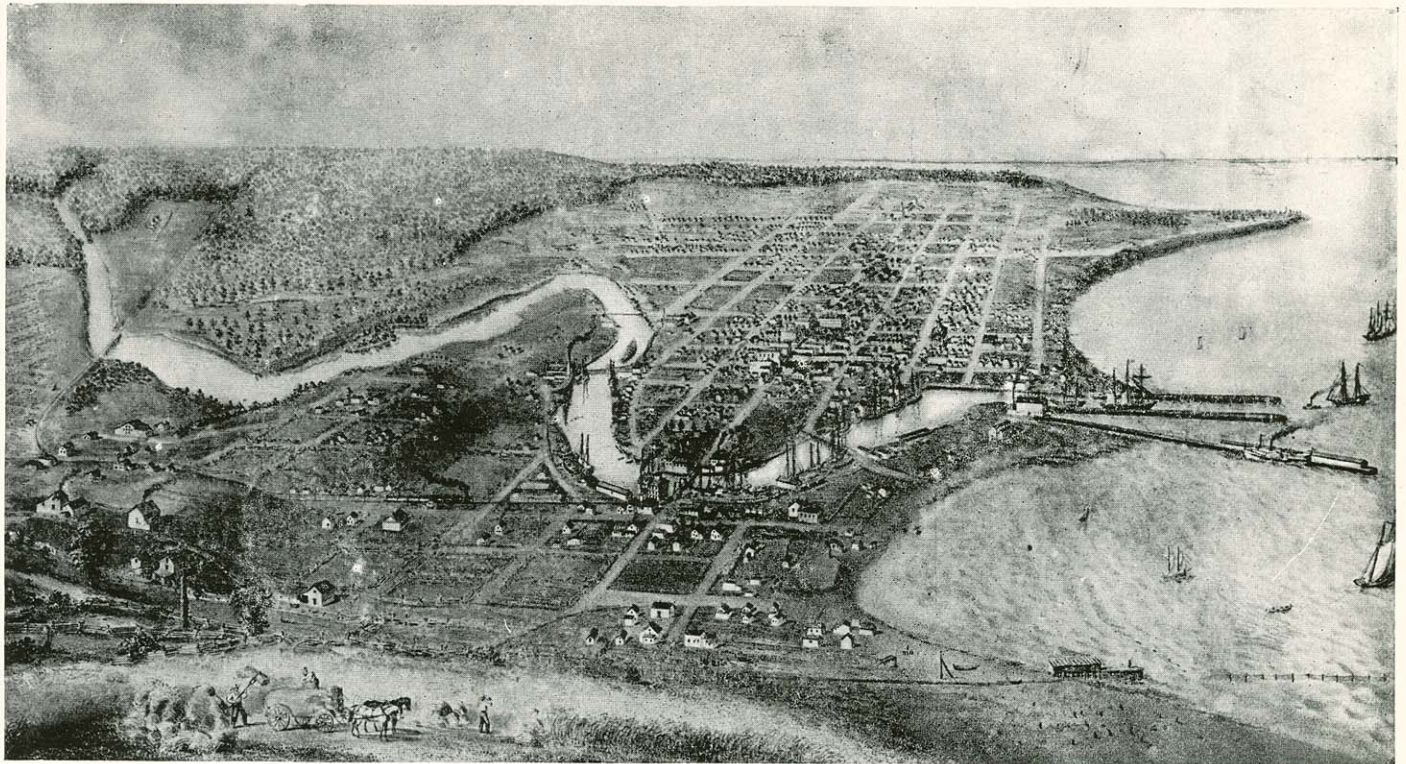
With the arrival four years later of William Paine and Colonel Oliver C. Crocker, the Sheboygan area saw its first sign of industry and commerce. These two men built the first saw mill and two log cabins—one of which was near the site of the present county courthouse—after deciding to settle here.

This property they sold, however, in 1835 to William Farnsworth who was rapidly gaining the reputation of being a promoter of progress in this frontier territory. At that time the government made a survey of this area and put the land on sale at Green Bay. It was promptly purchased by Farnsworth who bought up enough land to make him half owner of the village plat of Sheboygan.

FIRST WHITE WOMAN

The first white woman came to Sheboygan as a result of this transfer of property. Requiring help to look after his interests, Farnsworth went to Chicago to hire Mr. and Mrs. Jonathan Follett for that purpose, and they took the job. While her husband assisted Farnsworth or looked after his property while he was gone, Mrs. Eliza Follett attended to the feminine duties about the log cabins and was of general assistance about the village which was just beginning to spring up.





SHEBOYGAN—SEVENTY-FIVE YEARS AGO

It was not until December 17, 1838 that Sheboygan county was organized for legal and executive activities, although the area still judicially remained a part of Brown county. The first election of county and town offices occurred in March, 1839. The county had been created by an act of the territorial legislature on December 7, 1836, but it did not become independent of Brown county until May, 1846.

Many important events in the history of Sheboygan and Sheboygan county occurred during the year 1836 and immediately after, all in the wake of the building of the first sawmill. What is referred to as the first hotel, "The Sheboygan House" was built in 1836, and the village was platted the same year. Charles D. Cole organized a mercantile business and became the first postmaster, mail being delivered twice a week from Milwaukee and Green Bay. Other parts of the county became inhabited, and in 1840 the population was 133. The first building that really could be called a store was built in 1843, and a year later the population was 227.



SOLDIERS' MONUMENT

With the granting of a charter to the village of Sheboygan in 1846, the pioneer era of Sheboygan was at an end, and in the place where the Indians once had held their councils, the beginning of a prosperous community then existed.

VILLAGE GETS CHARTER

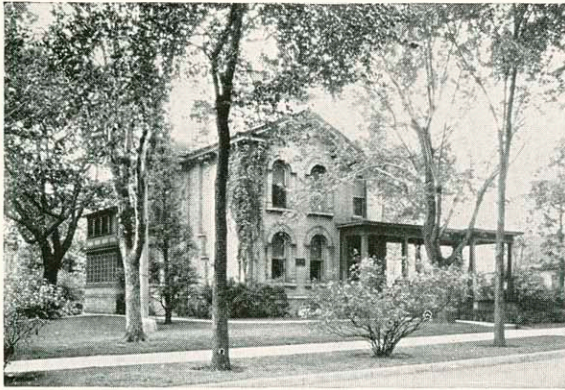
From the time that the village received its charter to the Civil War, Sheboygan continued to prosper. During the charter year, "The Sheboygan House" was opened formally as a hotel, and it was not long before many new businesses started. They included a machine shop, blacksmith shop, hardware store, men's furnishing shop, hide and leather store, a grocery, foundry, furniture store, bakery, jewelry store and many dwelling houses.

HISTORICAL DATA

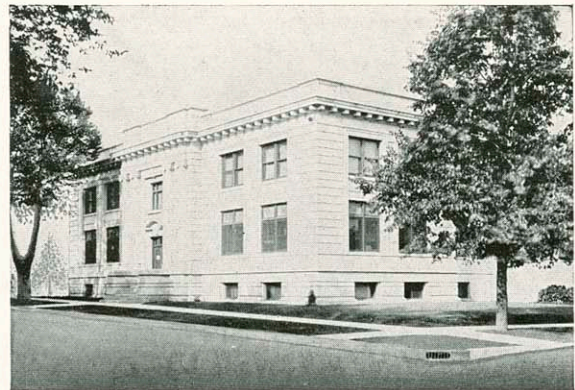
Editor's Note:—In the compilation of the data for this article, as many reputedly reliable sources as possible were consulted. As historical authorities frequently differ among themselves on various details, it will only be natural if there are differences of opinion on several of the dates contained in this article. However, the author feels that, on the whole, it is a truthful and accurate account of the development of Sheboygan from a wilderness and Indian village to a modern Middle Western city.

During the year 1853 Carl and William Roenitz started the tannery here which later became the American Hide and Leather company, which up to a number of years ago was one of the important industries in the state.

There is a rather hazy historical interlude during the early development of Sheboygan village because of the court house fire of 1860 which caused records previous to that year to be lost. The year of the fire, however, was important from other standpoints, for it was at that time that Karl Schurz, nationally prominent German-American spoke at Sheboygan and during the same year the first passenger train ran from Sheboygan to Glenbeulah was built.



AMERICAN LEGION HOME



PUBLIC LIBRARY

That the Civil War stirred the proper amount of patriotism in this community at the time is indicated by the fact that in 1861 the German bank and the Bank of Sheboygan offered \$15,000 to aid Governor Randall in equipping and marshalling forces to assist in protecting the property of the United States and in "putting down treason and rebellion." A recruiting office also was opened, and on August 15, 1862 all shops and stores in Sheboygan closed in order to aid in getting volunteers. A bounty of \$3,000 also was subscribed with the provisions that the quota be filled.

TELEGRAPH IN 1863

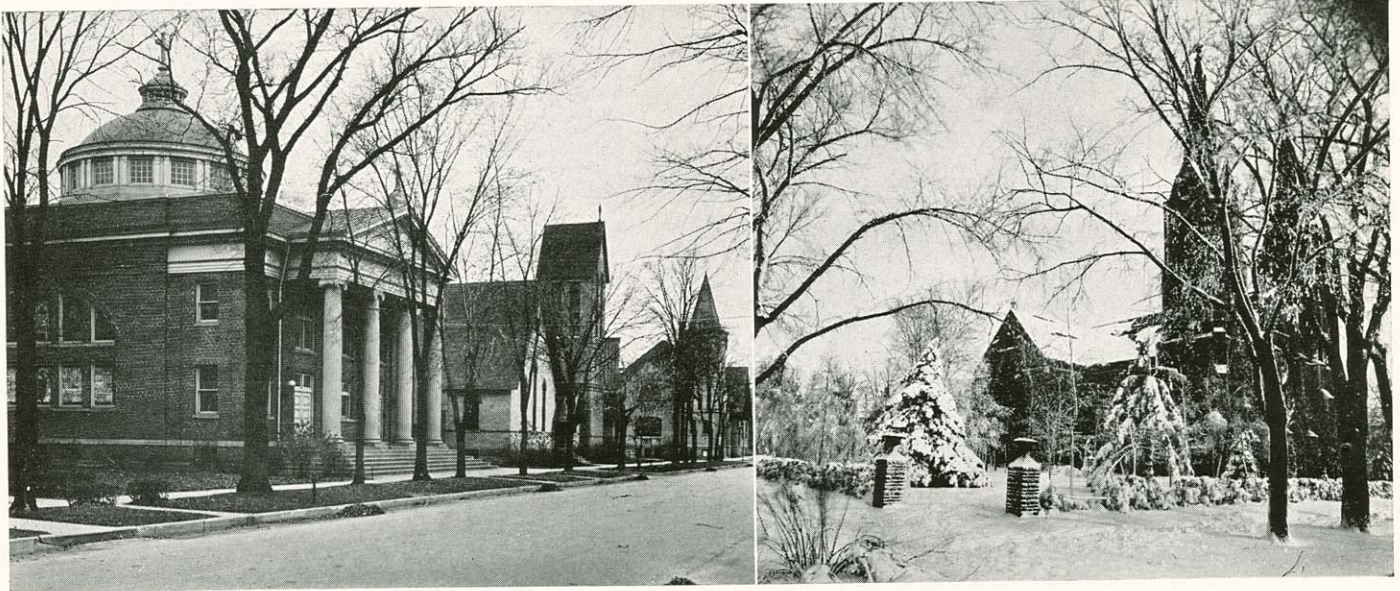
A number of important events also occurred in the year of 1863. The first board of trade was organized, and the first telegraph line into the village of Sheboygan was introduced.

The next decade also meant much for progress because the developments included much construction, establishment of a lumber yard, marble shop and the erection of sixty-nine new buildings. Work was also started on the Lake Shore railroad, and George B. Mattoon, later one of the outstanding men in building Sheboygan as a furniture city, started a furniture store.

The year 1868, however, changed the village of Sheboygan from just a "going" village to a manufacturing center, for in that year the Sheboygan Manufacturing Company—the present Sheboygan Chair Company—was organized. The Bemis Bros. and Crocker factory was started soon afterward, but was destroyed by fire in 1874. The Phoenix Chair Company started in 1869, and from then until 1891 many different factories sprang up and added to the growth of Sheboygan as an industrial center.



SHEBOYGAN—TODAY



A FEW OF THE MANY FINE CHURCHES

And Sheboygan was not like the man who stood still. Phenomenal growth from immigration and prosperous conditions greeted Sheboygan between 1881 and 1885. Railroad connections had been made. A large number of German immigrants swelled the population. Paving of the streets began. Electricity had come in, and electric cars had begun to supplant those formerly drawn by mules.

In 1900 an interurban electric line was built between Sheboygan and Sheboygan Falls, a distance of six miles. Two years later it was extended another seven miles to

Plymouth, and in 1909 the same number of miles were added to bring the line to Elkhart Lake. The Milwaukee, Manitowoc and Green Bay railroad, which was later to be known as the Chicago and North Western railroad, had begun operating between Sheboygan and Milwaukee as early as 1872. In 1908 the Milwaukee Northern Electric Company had built its line between Milwaukee and Sheboygan, and from that time on the city of Sheboygan was being served by both electric and steam lines as far as transportation and industry were concerned.



A VIEW OF THE LAKE FRONT FROM NORTH POINT



N. 8th STREET
LOOKING NORTH



THE NATIONAL SECURITY BUILDING



N. 8th STREET
LOOKING SOUTH

STILL MARCHING ON

Since those days, in comparatively recent years, bus lines have transplanted the electric interurban line to such points as Elkhart Lake, and a network of concrete and black-top highways has linked Sheboygan to every village in state and to every state in the union for automobile, bus, truck and other vehicular traffic. Airplanes fly overhead, telegraph messages transfer important messages, and the radio both brings and sends out the latest in entertainment and important news.

Sheboygan has become highly modernized. It is no

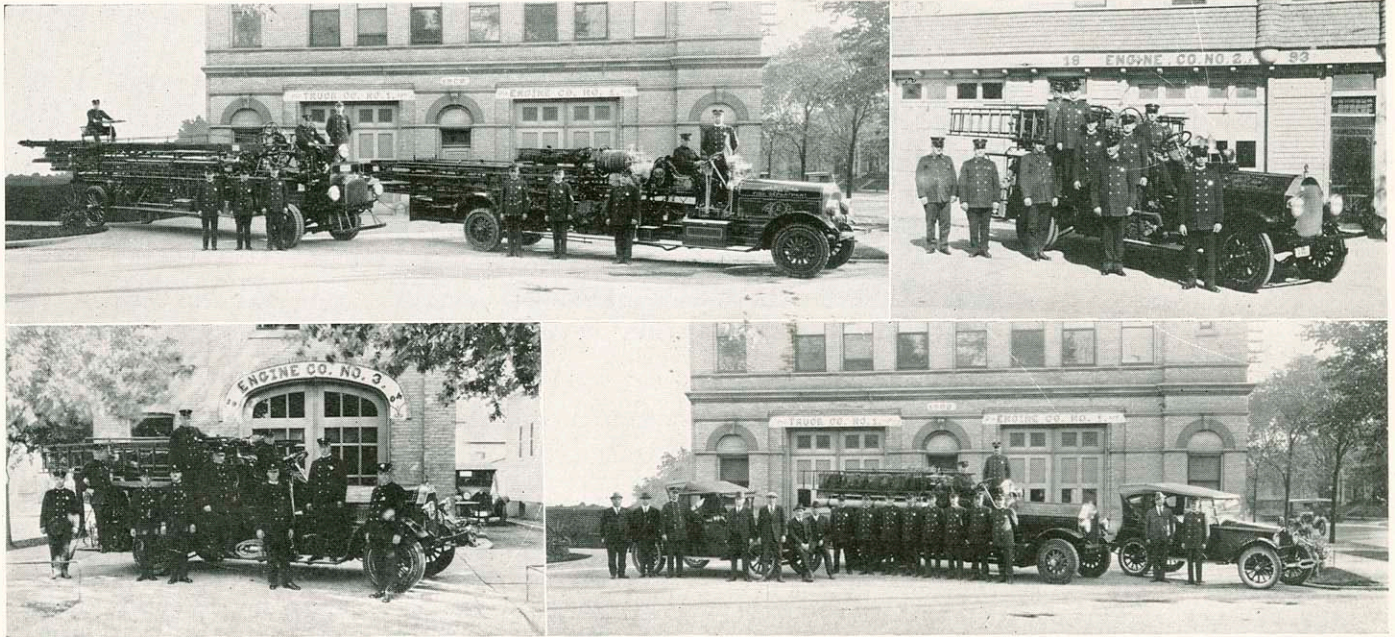
longer the wilderness that Jean Nicolet once gazed upon; it is no longer the frontier, log-cabin town that inspired the promotion for progress of William Farnsworth; it is no longer a small-town village with muddy roads and plank road connections; like its neighbors, also, it has survived the board-walk, gas-light days.

Sheboygan is now a metropolis on a minimized scale—it is a part of the world. It has advanced during the past one hundred years from a barely recognized settlement to what it is today. It will continue to advance with the march of progress, the march of time.



BENEDICT'S OLD HEIDELBERG CLUB, SEVENTH FLOOR NATIONAL SECURITY BUILDING

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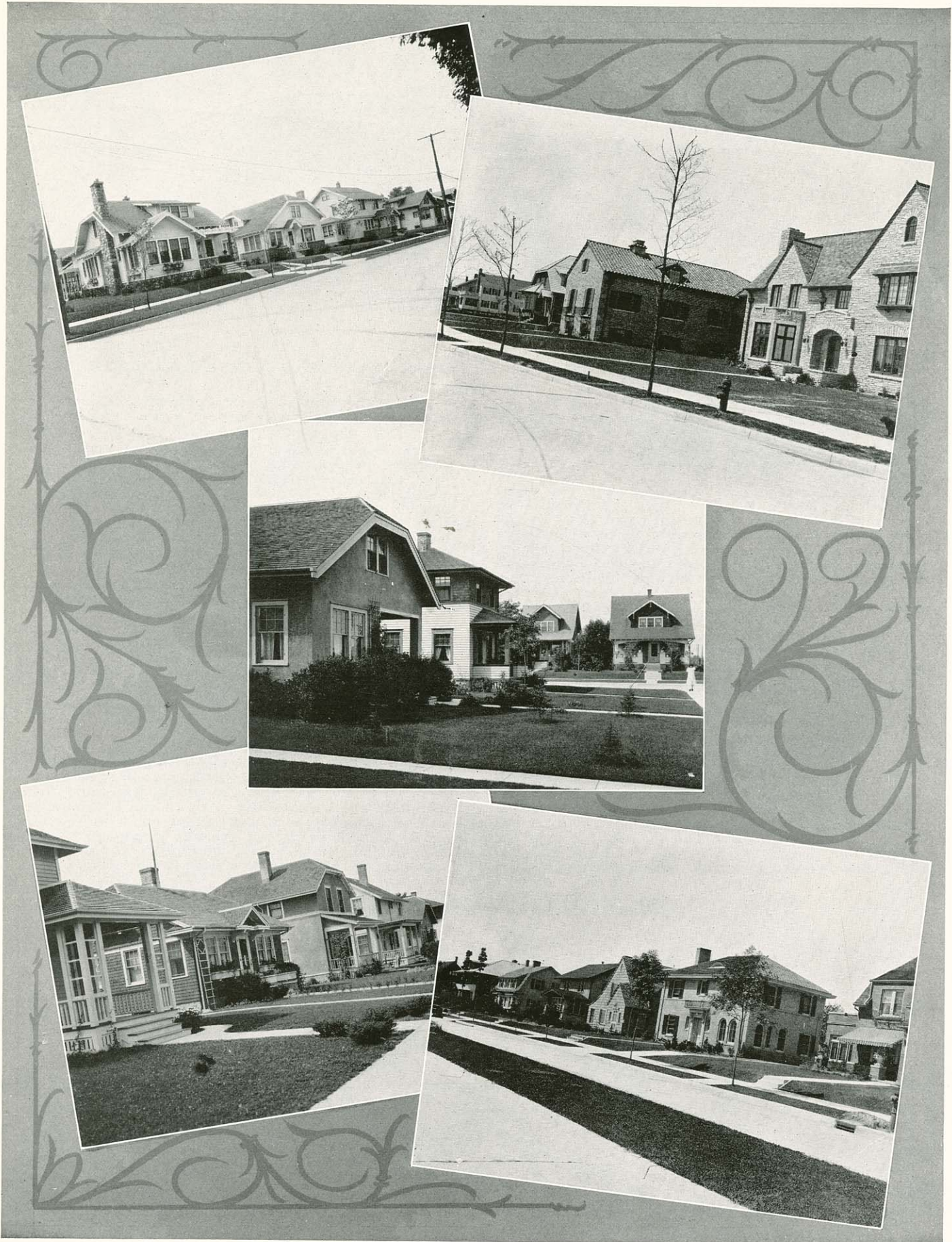
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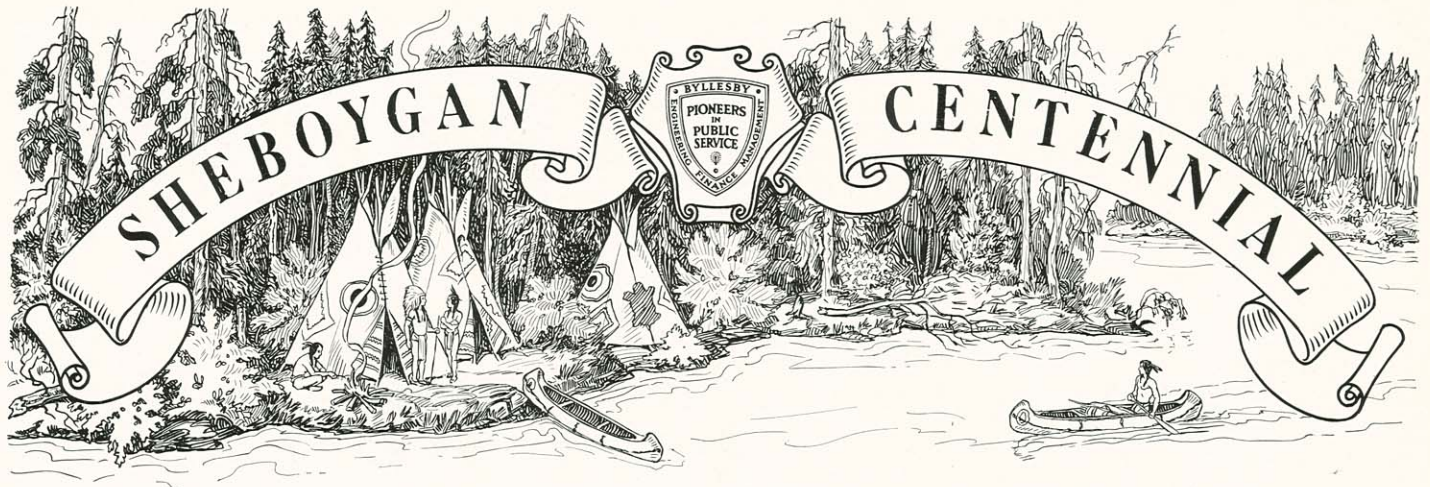
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RESIDENTIAL SECTIONS OF SHEBOYGAN



Gas Industry has 63 Years of Interesting History in Sheboygan

AS early as 1855 enterprising citizens of Sheboygan secured a charter for a gas plant from the city authorities but, because of financial or mechanical difficulties, were unable to complete their plans. 16 years later—in 1871—the vision of these public service pioneers was realized, and the Citizens Gas Light and Coke Company was organized by E. P. Larkin, E. H. Goodrich, J. J. Orton, A. A. Avery and E. Marnier. In the spring of 1872, over 62 years ago, the first gas light brought cheer to the people of the young city. For a number of years this company, popularly known as the "Sheboygan Gas Company," struggled along. Rates were \$3.50 per thousand cubic feet. Helpers at the plant and on the street were paid as low as \$35. a month.

Unable to earn a satisfactory profit on its business, it merged, in 1886, with the newly formed National Gas Light and Fuel Company and was known as the Sheboygan National Gas Company. The new company had urged needed improvements on the old concern and when the latter could not make them, asked for and secured a charter to serve the city with gas and in the end absorbed the original company.

Many improvements were made soon after. Gas was reduced in price to \$2.75 per thousand cubic feet. Records show that coal retailed for about \$3.50 per ton at this time and that wood was free. Gas was used entirely for lighting.

During the years that followed, up to 1900, ranges were being perfected and in that year the company was sold to J. T. Linn of Detroit, and the use of the fuel for cooking was developed. In 1905 Mr. Linn sold his interests to Howard J. Lescher who changed the name

to the Sheboygan Gas Light Company. Several plant improvements had been made the year before to take care of the new cooking business.

In 1915 the need for more capital and further changes and improvements and the great demand for main extensions caused the sale of the firm to the Wisconsin Securities Company, of Milwaukee. In 1923 it became part of the Wisconsin Public Service Corporation. This same year a high pressure main was laid to Kohler and Sheboygan Falls, to be followed during the next few years by an extension to Plymouth, Elkhart Lake, Kiel, New Holstein and Chilton.

Where the pioneer company, in 1871, found people using gas only for lighting, we find a multitude of uses at present, industrially, commercially and in the home. Many people still enjoy gas lighting, while nearly every home enjoys gas for cooking or water heating and hundreds use it for room heating, incineration, clothes drying, ironing and refrigeration. Where the original cost of gas was \$3.50 per thousand, or higher, the present average cost for the people of Sheboygan is \$1.35, per thousand, although coal prices have doubled and tripled in the same period.

A great public servant has been built here in Sheboygan on a sound foundation of honest dealings and integrity to the public welfare. It is proud to be a citizen and taxpayer, a participant in the privileges and duties of one of the outstanding cities in the state and the nation. Sheboygan's Centennial and Homecoming Celebration offers us the welcome opportunity of reaffirming our faith in the community and our determination to be of utmost service to its people.

WISCONSIN PUBLIC SERVICE CORPORATION

