CHAPTER IX

WALWORTH COUNTY

The present Walworth County was included in Milwaukee County until 1836, and in Racine County until 1839. It is four townships square and has an area of 562 square miles*. Each of the 16 townships is supposed to be 6 miles square and to have an area of 36 square miles; this would make the area of the county 576 square miles, or 14 more than the actual area.

When the first settlers came in 1835, the region was one of alternating prairies and oak openings. The larger prairies are shown in Fig. 11; many smaller ones are not shown. It is said that the oak openings were "as free from underbrush as an orchard". The first settlers selected their claims so as to include both prairie and woodland. The prairies received definite names, many of which are still used, as: Round prairie, Heart prairie, Meacham’s prairie, Elkhorn prairie, Geneva prairie, Spring prairie, Gardner’s prairie, Turtle prairie, and Sugar Creek prairie.

The most important Indian village in the county was at the head of what is now Lake Geneva, then called Bigfoot Lake. The village was called Bigfoot, for it was the residence of the Potawatome chief, Bigfoot, and consisted of some sixty families. The stolid chief and his followers were required to leave their village and hunting grounds in 1836, for the Potawatomies had ceded their lands to the U. S. Government and had agreed to removal across the Mississippi.

Settlers came in with a rush during 1836, and settlements soon grew up at Geneva, Spring Prairie, Delavan, Troy, and East Troy, though some of the places bore different names at the beginning. Spring Prairie was the most important of these early settlements. In the fall of 1836, there were 35 families in the county. Game was exceedingly abundant and formed a valuable item of food. One settler at Troy is reported to have shot 98 deer during the winter of 1838–39. In 1836 the nearest post office was at Racine; in 1837, one was es-

* U. S. Census.
established at Burlington in Racine County. In 1838 the first post office in Walworth County was established at Spring Prairie and was called Franklin Post Office. By 1840 twelve post offices had been established.

Fig. 85—Map showing the position of the Niagara and other escarpments in southeastern Wisconsin. Arrows at the right indicate the direction of movement of the ice in the Lake Michigan lobe and the other arrows the direction of movement of the ice in the Green Bay lobe.

**EARLY TRANSPORTATION**

When the white settlers arrived, the only beaten paths were the Indian trails, a number of which traversed the present area of Walworth County. Some of these developed into the main highways of the region. As early as 1837 a road from the Rock River to Racine was marked out. A government road,
though a poor one, was cut through from Milwaukee to Janesville in 1838; it ran through East Troy, Maheu, Millard, and Richmond and was a mail route for over 40 years. One of the important early roads from Southport (Kenosha) to Beloit ran through Geneva. Another equally important one ran from Racine westward through Burlington across Walworth County to Janesville. The important roads of 1840–56 are shown in Fig. 86. These main highways leading to Milwaukee, Racine, and Kenosha were lines along which an enormous amount of wheat moved during the years 1840 to 1860. During the autumn, the farmers' wagons formed almost a procession, for wheat was the one big crop of the region, and nearly all of it had to be hauled in wagons to ports on Lake Michigan, 25 to 50 miles away.
EARLY INDUSTRIES

Nearly all of the settlers came for the purpose of farming, but a few were mechanics, merchants, and professional men. Saw mills and flour mills were needed at once and wherever waterpower was obtainable, a little mill was sure to spring up. In 1840 the county had three grist mills and seven saw mills; there were also ten general stores. The population rose from 1019 in 1838 to 2611 in 1840. This gain in two years was as much as the gain in 30 years from 1860 to 1890. The gain in the next four years was still greater—from 2611 to 8000.

By 1845 the county had nine grist and flour mills, eleven saw mills, two carding mills for wool, and one woolen mill. Wheat growing had reached such a stage that one farmer raised 5625 bushels in 1845. Considering the county as a whole, its manufactures have been very closely connected with agriculture, which is the one chief occupation of the people of the county. In 1860 over half of the manufactured products of the county consisted of flour and feed; the second industry in importance was the making of agricultural implements (in five small factories). Twenty years later, in 1880, flour and feed still led, while wagons ranked second and agricultural machinery third. In 1880 there were seven wagon factories in the county; all of these have since disappeared. At present (1920) milk products are the leading manufactures; there are nine milk condensaries in the county.

MAIL ROUTES IN 1845

A stage ran three times a week from Milwaukee through East Troy, Troy, Elkhorn, and Richmond to Janesville; also a stage from Milwaukee to Madison passed through Whitewater three times a week. A tri-weekly stage ran from Racine through Spring Prairie, La Fayette, Elkhorn, Delavan, and Darien to Janesville; another from Southport carried the mail to Bloomfield, Geneva, Walworth, and Sharon to Beloit. In those days the arrival of the stage was the principal event of the day. Letters were rare, and in the early days the postage was 25¢ for each letter, and was usually paid by the receiver. The roads were wretched at the best, and in wet weather were almost impassable.
COMING OF THE RAILROADS

The first railroads in Wisconsin were built westward from ports on Lake Michigan and were designed to carry farm products to Lake ports for shipment eastward, and to carry freight from these ports to interior settlements. The more ambitious railroads aimed to connect Lake Michigan with the Mississippi River.

The first railroad in Wisconsin ran from Milwaukee to Waukesha, Madison, and to the Mississippi at Prairie du Chien. This pioneer road, now a division of the Chicago, Milwaukee and St. Paul system, reached Whitewater in 1852 and gave a boom to the place. In 1855-6 the Racine, Janesville, and Mississippi, now a division of the C. M. & St. P. was built through Walworth County (Fig. 33). In 1856 the main line of the Chicago and North Western from Chicago to Madison cut across one corner of the county, touching the village of Sharon. The railroad from Kenosha to Rockford, Ill., (completed in 1862) barely touched the southeastern corner of the county at Genoa Junction. A short line of road was built from Genoa Junction to Geneva in 1856, but failed, and train service was discontinued for several years. In 1871 the line was revived and is now a branch of the C. & N. W. system.

In 1901 an important line of the C. M. & St. P. between Chicago and Madison was built across the southwestern part of the county touching Walworth. A short line belonging to the C. M. & St. P. system also connects Elkhorn and Eagle. Four townships of the county have no railroads and practically all of the railroad mileage in the county belongs to branch lines rather than to main lines. Walworth County farmers, like those of all eastern Wisconsin, mortgaged their farms to raise money to assist early railroad companies. Some of the roads were built and failed; others were never built, but the deluded farmers had to pay the mortgages just the same. Bitter resentment followed, and railroad companies have never been able to outlive the suspicion which these early frauds aroused.
WHITEWATER

The first settler in Whitewater located his claim in 1836. Like many other villages, the town grew up around a mill located at a waterpower; it was built in 1839. Whitewater is in a region of extensive glacial deposits, among which are beds of clay. One of these gave rise to a brick yard, started in 1841. In 1843 a second flour mill was built. In 1844 the village had 29 dwellings and six stores. In 1845 a pottery began making coarse articles such as flower pots and jugs; in 1855 there were two potteries operating. In 1850 a stove foundry was attempted but was unsuccessful. At this time the village also had a distillery. When the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railroad built its tracks through the village in 1852, the place grew rapidly and became the leading town of the county; it was incorporated as a village in 1858.

About this time (in 1857) an inventor, George Esterly, who had perfected certain grain-harvesting machinery made Whitewater the center of his manufacturing operations, and for many years this plant was the most important in Whitewater, employing 400–500 hands. Mr. Esterly also established a furniture factory which was employing 75 persons in 1880. When the Esterly works left the city in 1893, it began a decline in population from which it has not fully recovered. Whitewater was for years one of the leading wheat-shipping stations on the Milwaukee and Mississippi Railway. During 1854, 322,000 bushels of wheat were shipped from that point; there were in the village seven warehouses for handling grain at that time.

Prior to 1860 another large manufacturing concern—the Winchester and Partridge Manufacturing Company—began the manufacture of plows, and later of wagons. The "Whitewater Wagon" became widely known, and it is said that 70,000 of them were turned out between 1864 and 1880. The company employed from 150 to 200 men.

A paper mill was established in 1860 and continued up to about 1895. In 1885 Whitewater was incorporated as a city. The principal industries at present are a milk condensary employing about 50 persons and a pea cannery employing in the canning season about 125 persons.

At various times the city has had a number of industries, many of which have since been discontinued; these included a
Fig. 87—Normal School, Whitewater, the second State Normal School established in Wisconsin (1868).
second wagon factory employing 30–50 persons; a leaf tobacco factory employing about 75 persons; a wire screen manufacturing company employing 35 persons; a brewery, distillery, planing mill, creamery, cheese box factory, tannery, etc.

The second normal school in Wisconsin was established in Whitewater in 1868 (Fig. 87). The school has been for a half century a real influence in education in the state, and has given an atmosphere of culture to the city. One man, Prof. Albert Salisbury, who gave 38 years of his life to the school, including 26 years as president, left a distinct impress upon hundreds of teachers who were fortunate enough to come under his influence.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>1860</th>
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<th>1880</th>
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<th>1890</th>
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<tr>
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<td>750</td>
<td>2,831</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

TABLE XLIV. Population of Whitewater

LAKE GENEVA

This is another example of a place that owes its particular location to a water power site; in this instance, the outlet of Lake Geneva. Here the first flour mill in the county was built in 1837; in the same year a post office was established. The name was Geneva until 1882, when the present name of Lake Geneva was adopted.

An important road and stage route between Kenosha (Southport) and Beloit was established through Geneva in 1840, and in 1844 the settlement became an incorporated village. The Lake Geneva flour mills, at the water power, were patronized by a large part of the surrounding county, and the highway leading to Southport was one of the great thoroughfares for hauling wheat during the decades from 1840 to 1860. In the early days there were two saw mills in the place. Of the 403 people in the village in 1844, 206 came from New York, 54 from Vermont, and 19 from Massachusetts.

The most important event in the early history of the village was the coming of the railroad in 1856. The place grew slowly, and in 1870 had a population of only 998. (Fig. 90)
Fig. 88—Part of the business section of Lake Geneva. Population of the city in 1920 was 2,632.
Manufacturing has never been important; the reputation of the place rests upon the beautiful lake and its superb setting. Lying, as it does, near Chicago, and having a shore of great beauty, the lake has attracted many wealthy men who have built, on the south shore particularly, some of the most expensive summer homes to be found in Wisconsin. Estates valued at hundreds of thousands of dollars are numerous. The fleet of beautiful private yachts on the lake is probably not equalled on any other lake in the United States.

Overlooking the south shore of the lake, on a high eminence is the great Yerkes observatory containing one of the largest refracting telescopes in the world. At the west end of the lake is the small village of Fontana, and nearby on the north shore are the summer camps of the Y. M. C. A. and Y. W. C. A., to which hundreds of young people go yearly.

**Table XLV. Population of Lake Geneva**

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<thead>
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<th>Year</th>
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<tbody>
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<td>1885</td>
<td>2,231</td>
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<tr>
<td>1890</td>
<td>2,297</td>
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<tr>
<td>1895</td>
<td>2,452</td>
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</table>

**DELANAV**

Two remarkable men—Henry and Samuel Phoenix—settled here in 1836 and named the place Delavan in honor of a noted temperance leader of New York. The settlement was intended to be a temperance colony and all deeds to property given by the Phoenix brothers contained a clause forbidding the sale of intoxicants on the property. A post office was established in 1837 and a saw mill and grist mill erected some years later. By 1846 the village had a population of 400 with shops engaged in making fanning mills, plows, etc., on a small scale. Delavan was on one of the most used of the early highways, the one extending westward from Racine to Janesville. This road was planked from Racine to Delavan and was one of the leading thoroughfares of its time. Delavan was incorporated as a village in 1855, and in 1856 the Racine and Mississippi Railroad built its tracks through the village. This is now a division of the C. M. & St. P. system. Delavan contains one of the notable state institutions of Wisconsin—the School for the Deaf—organized in 1852.
Manufactures. Several modest efforts at building up manufacturing have been made. In 1861 a pump factory was established which turned out 5000 wooden pumps a year; later, iron pumps and wind mills were made. Then followed a tack factory which did not prove successful. In 1903, however, an industry was started which has added greatly to the economic life of the city; it was the Globe Knitting Mills. Later it became the Bradley Knitting Company, and has grown into a large and important industry (Fig. 89). Its chief product is woolen sweaters. In 1910 it was employing 100 persons. During the War (1918) it employed 400 or more.

One of the eight milk condensaries of Walworth County is in Delavan.

Table XLVI. The Population of Delavan

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
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<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Population</th>
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<td>2,238</td>
<td>1920</td>
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Lakes. Near Delavan is Delavan Lake, second only to Lake Geneva in attractiveness. It, too, is surrounded by beautiful
summer homes and is one of the select summer resorts of southern Wisconsin. Between Delavan and Geneva is Lake Como, also a favorite summer playground. These three lakes are all of glacial origin, caused by the terminal moraines of the Delavan Lobe. Lakes Geneva and Delavan lie between two moraines, the Elkhorn moraine and the Darien moraine, while Lake Como lies behind the Elkhorn moraine.

ELKHORN

Elkhorn is built upon a site which was selected and platted for a village because it was at the exact center of the county. Unlike most sites selected for early settlements it had no waterpower. It grew slowly and in 1849 had 539 people. One of the most travelled roads in the region—the Janesville-Racine road already referred to—passed through Elkhorn. A writer in the Racine Advocate (Oct. 17, 1843) says of this road: "It is the easiest and pleasantest route from the Rock River to the Lake Michigan and is well provided with good public houses". At one time this road was planked from Racine westward as far as Delavan. The Racine and Mississippi Railroad, previously referred to, passed through Elkhorn in 1856. This road, and the promise of others, gave something of a boom to the village, and in 1857 it had a population of about 1500, but afterwards declined. In 1870 a short line of railroad was built from Elkhorn to the Prairie du Chien division of the C. M. & St. P. R. R. at Eagle.

Elkhorn has been and still remains a business center of a rich farming region. It has never acquired important manufacturing concerns because it is, like other towns in the county, an inland city, off the main lines of communication, and holding out fewer advantages for manufacturing than are afforded by the cities on Lake Michigan, not far away. In 1920 the city had one manufacturing establishment of considerable importance, the Frank Holton Company, makers of brass band instruments, employing from 100 to 150 persons.

**Table XLVII. Population of Elkhorn**

<table>
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<td>1895</td>
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<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>1,707</td>
</tr>
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<td>1,991</td>
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</table>
Villages of Walworth County

In addition to its four cities, Walworth County has four incorporated villages: East Troy and Genoa Junction each having a population of about 700; Sharon, with a population of about 900; and Walworth with about 800. All are on railroads. East Troy, however, is served only by an electric railway running to Milwaukee.

There are also eleven smaller places ranging from hamlets to villages of 300 to 400 people. These are: Allen Grove,
Darien, Fontana, Honey Creek, Lake Beulah, Lyons, Springfield, Troy Center, Williams Bay, and Zenda. Practically all of these, in addition to being post offices and local trading centers, have either creameries or milk condensaries.

Agriculture in Walworth County

Of the five counties with which this Bulletin deals, Walworth is the most distinctly agricultural. Each of the other four counties has at least one city of good size, but the largest city in Walworth County has less than 4000 people, and its four cities and four incorporated villages together have fewer people than live in Kenosha alone. From the early settlement in 1835 down to date, Walworth County has been one of the prosperous agricultural counties of the state. Its lands were very rapidly occupied by settlers, most of whom came from New York and New England, bringing with them high ideals of citizenship. The very name of the county was given in honor of a distinguished jurist of New York state. The county has always had a dominantly American population.

There are about 2800 farms in the county. All of the land except 6 per cent is included in farms, and about two thirds of it is productive of crops or used for pasturage.

Soils. All of Walworth County, except the southwestern corner, was over-ridden by the ice of the Wisconsin glacier which was the last glacial invasion of this region. Nearly all of the soil, therefore, is glacial drift of the most recent deposit. The town of Sharon is covered by drift of the Illinoian age, which is much older than the Wisconsin drift. Two conspicuous ranges of morainic hills cross the county in large loops. In fact, about 75 per cent of the surface of Walworth County is covered with either terminal moraines or ground moraine, most of which is clay loam, with frequent patches of sandy and gravelly loam. The northern tier of townships contain a great deal of gravel, known as "glacial outwash", because it was deposited by streams flowing from the melting glacier. Running water is a great sorter of the materials which it carries; the coarse gravel is deposited near the glacier and the fine sand and clay is carried farther away. The towns of Lafayette and Spring Prairie are largely covered with hilly moraine deeply trenched by Sugar Creek which flows in a valley nearly two hundred feet deep in places.

Only a relatively small part of the county is strictly level, yet the highest hills seldom rise more than 100 to 150 feet.
above the surrounding lowlands, and the difference in altitude between the highest and the lowest land in the county is scarcely 250 feet. Land of this general character gives rise to diversified farming.

Crops. Walworth County lies in the great corn belt of the United States, the greatest corn-producing region of the world. This is the leading crop of the county; it is grown on 55,000 to 65,000 acres annually, and yields a crop of from two million to three million bushels. Much of the corn is cut green and placed in silos for winter feeding; 2400 of the 2800 farms had silos in 1918; in this respect the county is a leader. Oats rank second among the crops, being grown on about 40,000 acres. Hay ranks third in acreage, not far below oats. It will be noted that each of the three leading crops is grown primarily for feeding to farm animals, and not directly for

Fig. 91.—Map showing the progress of wheat production in southeastern Wisconsin. Note the effect of war prices upon the crop of 1919.
human food. This is due to the great number of cattle and hogs which are raised in the county.

**Ups and Downs of Wheat Raising.** In Walworth County as in the other counties, wheat was the chief crop grown in the early days. It was the only crop which always had a market and an immediate cash value. Most of Walworth County was without a railroad until 1855, and wheat had to be hauled in wagons all the way to Lake Michigan ports. In 1850, a crop of over 600,000 bushels was raised in the county, and the larger part of it was hauled to Milwaukee, Racine, or Kenosha. In 1860 the crop exceeded 800,000 bushels. Soon after the Civil War wheat production fell off notably, reaching 605,000 bushels in 1870; and declining to 12,000 bushels in 1910. The European war of 1914-18 so raised the price of wheat that Walworth County again raised wheat, producing 175,000 bushels in 1917, and 135,000 bushels in 1920 (Fig. 91).

![Fig. 92—Diagram showing the rise and decline in the number of sheep in Walworth County.](image)

**Sheep-Raising.** As already pointed out, Walworth County has a large amount of land better suited to pasturage than to the plow; this was devoted to sheep more than to cattle down to about 1885. Even as early as 1850, the county had 22,744 sheep and ranked first in the state. Wool is also a crop which has a ready market, and owing to its high value in proportion to weight, is a good crop to be raised on farms somewhat removed from markets. The number of sheep in the county continued to increase until the eighties, reaching 118,000 in 1880. Soon after this, sheep-raising began to give way to dairying, and cattle became more and more numerous. In 1919 there were scarcely 10,000 sheep in the county and nearly half of these were in the town of Spring Prairie. Aside from this one town sheep-raising is now a negligible industry in the county (Fig. 92).

**Swine-Raising.** Corn-growing and hog-raising usually go together, but this is true only to a moderate extent in Walworth County. In 1910 the U. S. Census reported over 56,000 swine; while in 1918 the number was estimated at 37,000.
Dairying. This is now the dominant type of farming in the county, as it is in Wisconsin generally, for Wisconsin is the foremost dairying state in the Union. Up to 1880 dairying was a subordinate industry in Walworth County, which then had only 14,700 dairy cows. In 1890 the number had risen to 26,000, in 1910 to 39,000, and in 1919 to 40,000 (Fig. 93).

Cheese-making has never been important, but butter-making rose to great importance between 1900 and 1905. In the latter year, the county had 52 creameries which made 5,000,000 pounds of butter. The number of creameries had declined to 30 by 1910 and to 8 in 1920. At the same time the amount of milk produced kept on increasing. A large amount is shipped to Chicago for immediate use in that city, and an increasing amount is used by milk condenseries which have been established at favorable collecting centers. In 1911 Walworth County had six out of fifteen condenseries in the state. In 1920 there were 8 in the county; they were at Whitewater, Elkhorn, Genoa Junction, Walworth, Sharon, Delavan, Darien, and East Troy.

The high prices received for milk in recent years have added greatly to the prosperity of the county, and land values have advanced to unheard-of prices, reaching $250 to $300 an acre in some cases. The wealth of the county is between $2500 and $3000 per capita, or an average of fully $12,000 for every family. This is probably too low rather than too high.