GOVERNMENT

STATE AND NATIONAL
Prior to 1838, the Indians were the only permanent residents of what is now the Town of Norway. Though first the French and then the English had laid claims to the territory, neither of these governments made land grants or in any other way encouraged settlement. In fact, the only white men living in the entire area south of Green Bay and east of the Rock River during the French and English occupation, were four French fur traders.

In treaties that concluded the Revolutionary War, England ceded all of the territory east of the Mississippi River and south of the Great Lakes to the United States. At that time, both Virginia and Massachusetts laid overlapping claims to land that included southeastern Wisconsin. When the new federal government assumed the states' war debts, these claims were dropped and the area became part of the federal domain. Congress, also needing cash to pay the war debts, planned the sale and settlement of this wilderness then known as the Northwest Territory.

Expansion westward from the the existing states started slowly and then quickened with the close of the War of 1812. The area that is now Wisconsin was included in the Territory of Indiana in 1800, then in the Territory of Illinoi in 1809, and finally in the Michigan Territory in 1818. During this early territorial period, eastern Wisconsin was roundly ignored. The area for all practical purposes remained Indian Territory, while southwestern Wisconsin, because of its lead deposits, was occupied and settled. However, that settlement was in turn responsible for the settlement of the remainder of the state. In 1832, difficulties in the lead mining region caused the Black Hawk War, that brought the entire area to the attention of the federal government.

At the close of the Black Hawk War, treaties were negotiated with the Indian tribes in the Northwest Terri
tory. The treaty with the Potawatomi Tribe was of special interest because this band of Indians controlled Southeastern Wisconsin as well as northern Illinois and Indiana and southern Michigan. According to terms of the treaty, the Indians were given new lands in the Kansas-Oklahoma region along with promises of food and clothing. In return, the Indians gave up all claims to land east of the Mississippi River.

With its entire area open for settlement, Wisconsin was separated from the Michigan Territory in 1836 and organized as a new territory. The original Wisconsin Territory included all of the present day state as well as that of Iowa and Minnesota and portions of both North and South Dakota. Two years later, the areas west of the Mississippi were reorganized as the Iowa Territory. Wisconsin with its present boundaries remained a territory until 1848 when it was admitted into the Union as a state.

COUNTY
Settlement of southeastern Wisconsin proceeded inward from port settlements built along Lake Michigan. These ports including Milwaukee, Racine, and Southport (Kenosha), by virtue of their size, became the seats of the county governments.

Settlement of the present day Racine County began in 1834. Reports of the soil fertility in the area created great excitement in the eastern states. As a result, many settlers arrived and by 1835, hundreds of settlers had established farms in the eastern part of the county. In response to the settlement, the Territorial Legislature detached Racine County from Milwaukee County. The original Racine County included the present day Kenosha County, which was not detached and organized as a separate county until 1850.

Racine County was named after its principal city. The city, first called Fort Gilbert after one of its early real estate developers, is named after the river entering Lake Michigan at its harbor. This river, now called Root River, was named "Chippecotton", which meant "root", by the
Indians because of the intertwining roots that grew in great numbers from its banks. The name "Racine", a French translation for "root", was applied to the river by French Jesuits who established missions in this region.

Throughout the years, the county government has provided the major government services for this area. These services include courts and other offices that make up the legal system, highway construction and maintenance, an agricultural extension agent, an extensive park system, welfare and social services, and police protection through the office of the county sheriff.

TOWN

Town governments were established to provide government services on a more local basis. The Town of Norway was created by an act of the Territorial Legislature in 1847. On April 6th of the same year at the first town meeting, the local citizens organized their town government. The minutes of that meeting as recorded on page one of the official town minutes follow:

At an Election held at the house of Jacob Jacobian the Town of Norway and County of Racine on the first Tuesday in April A.D. 1847 agreeable to an act of the last Legislature of the Territory of Wisconsin to enable the people of Norway to organize as a Town. The meeting having come to order Jacob Jacobian was called to the chair and P.L. Cheves appointed clerk. The board being duly qualified by William Adams a Justice of the Peace in and for the County of Racine and Territory of Wisconsin, and notice being given by the clerk of the election that the polls were open they then proceeded with the election.

Resolution

Resolved that the town clerk shall receive as a compensation for services the ensuing year Fifteen Dollars "$15.00."
Resolved that day officers whose fees are not specified by law shall receive as a compensation for services Seventy Five cents per day "$0.75."

Resolved that Thirty Dollars shall be raised for the support of the poor "$30.00."

Resolved that Timothy Mildownie, James Dalrell, and James Ash shall serve as fence viewers.

Resolved that Joseph Lenone serve as overseer of Highways in road district No. 15.

Resolved that Timothy Mildownie shall serve as overseer of Highways in District No. 13.

Report of Committee

Resolved that any Stud Horse over one year old running at large the owner shall forfeit the sum of Twenty Dollars for every such offense - $20.00.

Resolved that any Bull over one year old running at large the owner shall forfeit for every such offense the sum of Five Dollars $5.00.

Resolved that any Ram over six months running at large from the first day of August to the first day of December the owner shall forfeit the sum of Ten Dollars for every such offense $10.00.

Resolved that any Boar over three months old running at large the owner shall forfeit the sum of Five Dollars for every such offense $5.00.

It is interesting to note the lack of Norwegian names in the above minutes. Quite likely, the Norwegians had not yet gained citizenship in any large numbers or did not understand the principles of their new government. It is also apparent from the minutes that roaming farm animals and fencing were considered the most serious problems of that day.
The problems facing the citizens and their town government have changed through the years. To correct some of the larger problems, the town government has:

1. Built and maintained local roads.
2. Established school districts.
3. Created drainage districts.
4. Set up a sanitary sewer district.
5. Passed zoning ordinances.
6. Created a police force to supplement protection provided by the county sheriff.
8. Assessed property and collected taxes.

Today, the town government is run mostly on money returned by the state government from taxes it collects on sales, income, fuel, and utilities. The property taxes levied and collected by the town are used to pay county and school district assessments.

Elected officials of the town government include a Town Chairman and two Supervisors, all elected at large, that form the town board. Other elected town officials include an Assessor, a Town Clerk, a Town Treasurer, a Constable, and a Justice of the Peace. The Town Board runs the Town Government on a day-to-day basis. To do this, it passes laws, issues licenses, and directs the activities of town employees. Citizens, however, have a direct means of establishing priorities and policies as well as laws for the town. Once a year, at the annual town meeting, the citizens meet to discuss and resolve problems. This annual town meeting is normally held in April shortly after the spring elections. Another annual town meeting is now held in the fall for the purpose of preparing and approving the budget for the following year.

For almost 70 years, town board meetings as well as the annual town meeting were held in private homes. It was not until 1916 that a town hall was built to house these meetings. The building, which no longer serves its original purpose, is located at Black Hawk Corners, the intersection of County Highways "K" and "S."
Original Town Hall, built in 1916 at intersection of present county highways S and K

In 1960, the town purchased the Colonel Heg School building, located north of the Norwegian Lutheran Church. This building was remodeled and became Norway's Town Hall. In addition to town government offices, it also contains several large meeting rooms, which are used by civic and youth groups.